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THE BIRD'S NEST

AND OTHER SERMONS

FOR CHILDREN OF ALL AGES

SAMUEL COX D.D.

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THE BIRD'S NEST

AND OTHER SERMONS

FOR CHILDREN OF ALL AGES.

BY

REV. SAMUEL COX, D.D.

AUTHOR OF

"RABBI AGUR'S SCHOOL," "SALVATOR MUNDI," "THE BOOK OF JOB," "BALAAM, AN EXPOSITION AND A STUDY," ETC.

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PREFACE.

WITH a single exception, the Sermons comprised in this Volume were preached, in the order in which they are printed, on the anniversary of my Sunday School; and even the last was delivered to the same audience, though on a different occasion. For more than twenty years it has been our custom to set apart a Sunday in the summer on which the Chapel is made gay with flowers and flowering shrubs, and the children of the Congregation come to evening

service—the girls wearing "posies" and the boys "button-holes"—to take a prominent part in "the service of song," and to listen to a discourse specially addressed to them. The centre of the building is occupied by the Children, and all round them, and in the gallery, sit their parents and friends, and the members of the Congregation in general. It is the most crowded and popular service of the year. And a more interesting and interested audience than that which sits immediately before me, no minister could desire. If no sermons I have ever preached have cost me so much labour, none have met with a more immediate response or have won a more overflowing reward.

And, indeed, I can honestly say that no sermons have cost me so much; for I have not that rare natural gift which I have often admired, and sometimes envied, in other men,—the gift of so speaking to children as at once to command their attention, and to retain it to the

end. When, therefore, it became my duty to preach to them, all I could do was to select as striking and suitable a theme as I could find, with, if possible, a pretty story in it or a suggestive metaphor; and then to think it out clearly, and to express my thoughts in the simplest and most colloquial English I could command. And, verily, I had my reward, even if I were obliged, as I often was, to write my sermon two or three times before I could at all shape it to my mind. As long as I live I must remember the rows of bright intent faces on which I looked down; now attentive and amused, and now attentive and thoughtful, but always attentive, and responding to every note of thought or emotion which happened to be struck.

I had, however, one grave advantage on my side, if not two. For our Sunday School is a *Congregational* School; *i.e.* all the children of the Congregation, whether poor or well-to-do, attend its classes. And as my Congregation

is principally made up of professional men, or manufacturers and tradesmen, who are both able and anxious to give their sons and daughters a good education, I had, in my School, a much more intelligent and cultivated audience than could be expected in a Sunday School mainly intended for the poor and untaught. Many of our young people were in the Town Grammar School for boys, or the High School for girls; some were teachers in Board or Boarding Schools; a good number of them have passed the Cambridge and Oxford examinations; and two or three of them have matriculated at one of our Universities. So that though, as a rule, I used great simplicity of speech—and in rewriting these sermons for the Press I have been amused to come on clusters of twenty and thirty, or even forty and fifty, words of one syllable—there was no need to shrink from using any form of words which would best express my meaning.

The other advantage at which I glanced was this. For nearly ten years I was Superintendent of the School, which met only in the afternoon —coaching the Teachers in the lesson for the coming Sunday in the previous week, and then examining the Children at the close of the School in order to ascertain whether they had got any real hold of it. This delightful office brought me, of course, into very close contact with the Children, and gave me many opportunities of winning their affection and esteem. They were, in some sort, my "family," and I their rabbi, or "father"; while we all did our best to make the School a second home to them. Hence they were prepared and disposed to listen to whatever I might say. And it was only failing health which compelled me at last to lay down a task that I still feel to have been the pleasantest and happiest I have ever had.

This experiment of a *Congregational* School can only be tried, of course, in a town like

Nottingham which, besides offering many other educational advantages, contains so many Sunday Schools that there is a brisk competition for the neglected children of the poor and ignorant. But where two or three Schools are competing for every child, so that there is no fear of any being overlooked, it is surely allowable, and even advisable, for a Congregation here and there to retire from the competition, and to devote its attention mainly to the children of its own members. For though it is commonly assumed that the children of all intelligent and well-to-do Christian people receive regular religious instruction at home, any man who will look into the facts for himself will be amazed to find in how few Christian households any such instruction is given, how imperative it is, therefore, that the Church should recognize the claim which the children of her own members have upon her. Where this claim can be responded to by organizing a school specially

adapted to children of this Class, the results, judging by our experience, are most happy. For in such a School—especially when the minister, or some layman equally trusted by the parents of the Congregation, can find time and energy to conduct it—the majority of the Children are sure to be sufficiently intelligent and well bred to give a tone to the whole society. Teaching of a higher kind, and of a more spiritual tone, can be attempted. There is no trouble in keeping order, or in securing the most fit and competent members of the Church as teachers, or in raising whatever funds may be requisite for the efficient working of the School; for, where the best interests of their own children are concerned, parents are prepared to do or give whatever may be necessary to secure them. And, moreover, so at least we have found, the children come to love their School, and even to resent being kept away from it. With us, they have been reluctant to

quit it; many of them staid on in it long after they were grown men and women; they have "fallen in love with" and married one another; and some of them now send their children to the School of which, when they themselves were children, they grew so fond that they disliked leaving it. Best of all, nearly all of them have passed from the School into the Church on arriving at years of discretion, and are likely, I hope and believe, to be its strength in the coming generation. Of course, a few of them have disappointed the hopes we cherished of them; but, as a rule, they have fulfilled, and even outrun, them.

This brief description of my audience will explain, not only the general tone, but also many of the allusions in the discourses addressed to it; and, indeed, those who care to do so may find in these Sermons hints of our history, of the changes in the outward estate and spiritual condition of the School for the

last fifteen years. Without such a sketch, I could hardly expect that my readers should understand the tone of thought and appeal by which they are pervaded.

I have often been urged to print these Discourses by those who heard them. And now that I have complied with their wish, I can only hope that, in them, these pages may revive many happy memories; and that God may deign to use the Sermons to which they listened so attentively for the good of many who did not hear them. I should touch the top of my ambition, the very gold of my aim, if parents and teachers who care for the religious instruction and welfare of their children should find this a Volume which they would willingly place in their hands. It advances for itself, at least, one modest pretension for that honour. It is the only volume of *expository* sermons addressed to children of which I am aware: and if it brings out the meaning and applies the

lesson of words given by inspiration of God, it can hardly fail to do some good to the children who read it; while even "children of a larger growth" may find in it hints and glimpses of truth not wholly without value.

NOTTINGHAM.

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I.

HOW TO TAKE A BIRD'S NEST.

"If a bird's nest chance to be before thee in the way, in any tree or on the ground, with young ones or eggs, and the dam sitting upon the young or upon the eggs, thou shalt not take the dam with the young; thou shalt in any wise let the dam go, but the young thou mayest take unto thyself: that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days."—DEUTERONOMY xxii. 6, 7.

OES God take thought for birds, then? Yes, even for birds. They sow not, neither do they reap; yet our heavenly Father feedeth them. "Not *one* of them is forgotten before God," said the Lord Jesus Christ. And He proved that what He said is true. For He, who came to shew us the Father, Himself took thought for a single bird. In one of the Gospels we read that Jesus asked, "Are not *two* sparrows sold for *one* farthing?" and in another we read that Jesus asked, "Are not *five* sparrows sold for *two* farthings?" *Two* sparrows for *one* farthing,

and *five*, not four, sparrows for *two* farthings! You see, He did not forget even *the odd sparrow thrown into the bargain.*

Christ cared for birds, then; and therefore we may be sure that God cares for them. Not one of them, He says, can so much as fall to the ground without our Father. Think of *that* when you next see a lark, that has been soaring up in the sky and shaking down music like rain from the clouds, close his wings and sink suddenly into his nest. He cannot even do that, without God your Father. God has been listening to his music; and God sees him fall when his tune has been sung, just as He saw you sit down a minute or two ago when you had sung your hymn.

And this God, says Jesus, is your "Father." He loves *you* even more than He loves the birds, and guards you with a more watchful care. You would laugh if I were to ask you, Which does your mother love best, the canary that sings in the cage, or the little girl who sits in her lap? Which does your father love best, the little boy whom he holds by the hand as they walk through the fields, or the blackbird whom they see hopping through the grass? You are quite sure that father and mother love you far more than all the birds put together, from the merry little tomtit up to the sweet-voiced nightingale. And you may be quite as sure that you are "better" to your Father in heaven "than many sparrows;" yes, and better than all the birds He ever made.

But if you are so dear to God, your Father, should you not love Him because He loves you, and prove your love by caring for what He cares for? Well, He cares for birds. It is He who feeds them. It is He who clothes them with their beautiful feathers, giving them a new coat every year. It is He who teaches them their sweet songs. To care for birds, we may even say, is to worship God. For—

> He prayeth well, who loveth well
> Both man and bird and beast.
> He prayeth best, who loveth best
> All things both great and small:
> For the dear God that loveth us,
> He made and loveth all.

He marks the trees "where the birds build their nests," and "sing among the branches;" and He shews us, in one of the Psalms (civ. 12, 17), that He observes what kinds of tree the different birds select for use; does He not say, "As for *the stork, the fir-trees* are her house"? And, in my text, we may see that God cared for birds long before Jesus came to teach us with what tender care He watches over all the creatures He has made. He cared for them enough to give a law about how to take a bird's nest, a law which forbad the Jews to take "the *dam*," *i.e.*, the *dame*, or mother-bird, with her young.

Now I dare say some of you boys are pleased to find that there is such a law, or rule, as this in the Bible. You have not been quite sure in your minds, perhaps, whether it was right or wrong to take a

bird's nest, or even to take the eggs from the nest. And, I dare say, when you heard me read my text you thought, "Well, that's a capital rule! If I mustn't take the old bird, at least I may take the young ones or the eggs." But are you sure that *that* is the right way to read the Rule? I have not forgotten "what fun" it is to go birds-nesting; and, if I honestly could, I should be very glad to tell you that it is right. But, to be honest with you, I am afraid it is wrong. And, certainly, this rule has nothing in the world to do with it. It is not a rule for boys, but for men. It meant that when the fowler, or the sportsman, went out to catch birds, such as the savoury partridge or the plump-breasted quail, they were not to take the mother-bird when they took the young birds or the eggs. *Why* they were not to do that, we shall see by and bye. What I want you to mark for the present is, that the Rule lends no sanction to what you boys call "birds-nesting." Nor is there a word in the Bible that does. Whereas there are many *thoughts* in the Bible which go dead against it; and, above all, the thought on which I have already touched,—As God loves the birds and takes care of them, so will you, if you are good children of our Father who is in heaven. And is it *taking care* of them to rob them of the beautiful little houses which they have spent so much toil in building? Do you shew any love for them when you take young birds from their warm nest, to shiver out a few miserable hours or days for your amuse-

ment? Of course, if we really *want* eggs or birds, we may take them, whether we want them as food for the body or food for the mind; for God has put them all at our service. But to take them wantonly, without thought, without necessity, simply for the fun of it, is to wrong creatures whom God loves. As for taking the nest itself, I don't think any boy has a right to do that, for you cannot *eat* a nest; and you will never learn half so much from it when you have taken it, and put it in a box or on a shelf, as you would if you were to study it in the tree or the hedge, or the grass.

But, now, let us go back to our Rule again, and learn some other lessons from it. "This," said the Rabbis, "is *the least* among the commandments of Moses." ~~But I am not sure about that.~~ True, the commandment is only about a bird's nest; and nests are not as big as Churches. Nevertheless, a commandment about a very little thing may be a very large commandment. And at least one part of this commandment *is* very large; *viz.*, the reward attached to it. The precept runs into a promise. The precept is only about a bird's nest; but the promise is that he who obeys it shall have many days and happy days. "If a bird's nest be before thee, thou shalt not take the mother-bird with the young or the eggs, *that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days.*" Now think of that! If you take your bird's nest in the right way, you shall have a long life and a prosperous one! Why, this is more

than is promised to those who honour their father and mother! *Their* days are to be long in the land; but their promise says nothing about prosperity. Whereas those who take heed to their ways when they are looking for bird's nests are promised, not long life only, but that it shall be *well* with them as long as they live. The two greatest blessings the Jews knew, long life and prosperity, are to be granted to those who keep this commandment. And that can hardly be "the least of the commandments," which carries so large a blessing with it. It ought to be a great commandment, if we are to get so much for keeping it.

And I think I can shew you that it has great meanings in it; that it is quite worth our while to try to understand and to obey it. There are at least three such meanings in it. (1) It set a limit to the natural greed of men. (2) It brought the law of God into the little things of life. And (3) it taught the sacredness of love.[1]

I. *It set a limit to the natural greed of men.* What would be the first impulse of a Jew who found the nest of a quail, or a partridge, with the mother-bird sitting on the young ones or the eggs? Of course, his first impulse would be to take all he could get, the old bird as well as the eggs or the young. But

[1] I believe I am indebted for these meanings, I am sure I owe my conception of the ethical contents of this singular passage, to a sermon which I heard Mr. Melvill preach, in *The Golden Lecture*, nearly forty years ago.

to do that might be very poor thrift, and very poor morality. For in destroying the parent-bird with the young, the man might be helping to destroy a whole breed of valuable birds. He would get a dinner for *to-day*, but he would be lessening his chance of finding one *to-morrow*. He would be helping *himself*, but he might also be injuring *his neighbour*. All the game birds would soon die out of England if they were not preserved, or if no close time were allowed them. And even that would not be so great a calamity to us as it would have been to the Jews, who depended much more than we do on hunting and fowling for their food, and who could not import birds from other countries, as we perhaps might do. Hence the Law of God stepped in, and said: "Stop; think: take the young if you want them, but let the mother-bird go; for she may build another nest and rear another brood. Take enough for to-day; but don't forget to-morrow. Take enough for yourself; but don't forget your neighbour. *He* may find the nest next year, and may want it then even more than you want it now." So that God's care for birds was also a care for men. He was teaching them forethought, and charity. He was teaching them to be provident, and to be neighbourly, when He said, "Thou shalt in any wise let the dam go;" *i.e.*, Thou shalt do at least so much as that.

"*Don't be greedy*," then, is the first lesson we find in our bird's nest. "Don't snatch at all you can for to-day, careless about to-morrow. Don't grasp at all

you can for yourselves, unmindful of others. Think of the future. Think of your neighbours." And that is a lesson which all children need to learn. They cannot help being hungry, but they can help being greedy. It is natural and right that they should wish to have good things—not only good things to eat, but good things of many kinds; but it is wrong for them to grudge good things to others, to want to keep the best to themselves. Boys and girls should think of what they can *give*, as well as of what they can get. Nothing is pleasanter than to see a boy who is man enough to control himself, to govern and restrain his appetites, his passions, his tempers, unless it be to see a girl who is woman enough to think of others before herself, and to find her pleasure in pleasing them. Children who eat themselves ill, and play themselves cross, who cannot look beyond the present moment, and do not care who suffers so that they get their way, are like the Hebrew fowler who took the mother-bird with the young, and left nothing for to-morrow, nothing for his neighbour.

II. Another lesson taught by this law about a bird's nest is this: *It brings the law of God into the little things of life.* And that is just where we most need it, and are most apt to forget it. The words that told men how to take a bird's nest, taught them that there was a right and a wrong way of doing even such a little thing as that; and therefore they were very wholesome words. For what they meant was, that God was always with them, that nothing

so small could be but that they might do it unto Him; that even when they went out to walk, or to hunt, or to catch birds in the pastures and on the hills, they did not leave God behind them, nor their duty to Him; that God's pure and kindly will compassed them about on every side, and that they might shew their reverence for his will even in handling a bird's nest. And what could make them, what could make *you*, happier than to feel that the great Father in heaven is always with you, ~~even when you play in the fields; and, with you~~, both to shew you that which is right and to save you from the pain of doing wrong?

Let no one, my dear children, ever make you think of God as hard and cold and stern, or of duty as simply painful and austere. God is *love;* and his love is all about you like a soft summer air which brings health and gladness with it. You need not be afraid of *Him*. He is your best Friend; better than father, better than mother even, the Friend whom you should be most glad to have with you. If He ever looks austerely and rebukingly at you, it is only as a good father looks grave and forbidding, and shakes his head, when he sees that his child is thinking of doing something wrong, something the pleasure of which will soon pass, while the pain of it will remain. For it is this, it is wrongdoing, it is sin, not duty which is really painful. To obey God, to do one's duty, is not painful, though there may be pain in it so long as we are weak. It is like break-

ing through a hedge to get into a field full of all delights; we may get a few scratches in passing through; but who cares for a few scratches from the hedge, if he is sure of a good time in the field?

If the thought that God is always with you, and that you may be pleasing Him even in your play, is not a bright and happy thought to you, that is simply because you do not know Him, and how good and kind He is. Are you ever sorry to see your father, or your mother? If you meet them in the street as you are coming home from school, do not your eyes brighten with pleasure? do you not run to them? do you not jump and dance about them, and chatter so fast that they can hardly make out what you say? If they come into the garden or the field where you are playing, do you run away and hide from them, except in fun? Are you not glad to see them? Can they please you better than by having a game with you? Is there anybody you like so well to play with or to spend a holiday with? Well, but *God* loves you even better than they do. He is as much kinder than they are as He is wiser. Why, then, should you put away the thought of his Presence from you? What should make you happier, if you are fairly good children, than to know that He is always with you, indoors and out of doors, when you walk and when you play? Remember Him, then, in the days of your youth, and try to serve and please Him in all you do.

III. But this rule about birds-nesting teaches us

that *all love is sacred*, and this is the most beautiful lesson I have found in it. I want you to learn it very much, and will try to make it quite plain to you.

Now, think. If you were to find a nest, and saw the mother-bird with a brood of young ones under her wings, what would it be that would give you a good chance of catching her? It would simply be her love for her nestlings. If she cared only for herself, she could fly away out of your reach. At any other time she *would* use her strong swift wings, and dart away the very moment she saw you coming. But now, because she loves her young ones—her *children*, you know—and cannot bear to leave them when danger is near, she sits on in her nest, or she hovers close about her nest, and tries to strike your face with her wings. It is only because the mother-bird *is* the mother-bird, and will defend her brood at all hazards—it is only this self-forgetting love and devotion which puts her in your power. And, therefore the Law of God steps in, and forbids you to touch her. At other times, when there is no brood in the nest, you may take her, if you can. But not now, not when it is only her love for her young which moves her to run so great a risk. Love is sacred. It is base to take advantage of it. God forbids you to be so base. "Thou shalt take the young," if you need them; "but thou shalt in anywise," whatever your need, "let the dam go."

But if the love of a bird is sacred, how much more sacred is the love of a boy or a girl, of a woman or a

man! *All* love is sacred. It is base and wicked to take advantage of it, to turn it against itself, to use it for selfish ends. And yet I am afraid you all do that at times. Most children do, though they are often very sorry for it afterwards. Some of them do it constantly, habitually, and are not sorry for it until it is too late. Do not *you* know boys and girls who abuse the love of their parents? I do. They know that father and mother are very fond of them, and love to see them happy. And so when they cannot get what they want, they cry and stamp, or they sulk and scowl, or they worry and coax, till they get it, though all the while the fond foolish father and mother know they are spoiling them, and doing them harm instead of good. Now that is base and mean. To do that is to trade on love, to abuse it. It is to requite love with selfishness. It is like catching the mother-bird while she sits on the nest. For it is only the love of your parents which puts them in your power. If they did not love you, they would not care. You might sulk for a week, or cry till you were blind, or beg and pray till you were hoarse,—what would it matter to them? But because they love you, it does matter. And they are often weak and foolish enough to yield to you when they know they ought not, rather than see you fretful and unhappy. But if you thus take advantage of their love for you, where is your love for them? and what is it worth?

So, again, children often abuse the love of their

playmates and friends. You have a little brother, let me suppose, who is very fond and very proud of you. He trots about after you, admires you, imitates you, thinks there never was such a fine fellow as you are. And if you abuse the power his love gives you over him to take him where you know he ought not to go, or to make him do what you know he ought not to do, you sin against love; that is, you sin against God: for God *is* love, and all love is from Him. Or you have a big sister, let me suppose, who is very fond of you. She is always ready to help you with your lessons or your needlework, and to take your part. Well, if you are always thinking of yourself, if you never consider what she would like; if you are cross and wilful and fretful with her because you know she will put up with it, though nobody else would, you sin against love; that is, you sin against God: for God is love, and your sister's love is from Him.

I would have you think, therefore, how great a power love gives you, and how base and wrong it is to abuse that power. Love is the strongest thing in the world. People will do for love what they would do for nothing else. And there are those who know that, and who take such base advantage of it that they sometimes ruin the character and spoil the life of those who love and trust them. There is nothing in the world so wicked, so base, so vile. If you have parents, or brothers and sisters, or young companions and friends, who love you dearly, O take heed what

you do! Their love will be the comfort and joy of your lives if you retain and respond to it. But that love puts them in your power. You may hurt them through it, and grieve them through it, and make them go wrong when, but for you, they would have gone right. And if you do, you will be scorned by all good men and women. If you do, what will you say to the God of all love, and what will He say to you, when you stand before Him?

And that brings me to the very last word I have to say to you. Who is it that loves you best of all? most purely, most forgivingly, most tenderly? Ah, how bright the trees are and the flowers! how merrily the birds sing! what beautiful clouds sail across the sky! and how splendidly the sun shines through them, to ripen the fruits of the earth! How many of you have pure and happy homes, kind parents, instructors, friends who love you, and teach you, and would fain save you from all harm! And all these are gifts and tokens of your heavenly Father's love. It is *He* who loves you best of all, and has most dearly proved his love; for has He not sent his Son to die for you that He might give you life? He waits and longs to save and bless you. And He is very patient and forbearing. All day long, all the year round, He stands calling on you, by all his mercies, to come to Him and to be happy in his care for you. He wants you to love Him, that you may know and feel how great his love is for you. And perhaps you are abusing his love and patience, and

living on without much thought of Him, without any true love for Him. *Are* you? Is not even his love sacred to you? Are you using his gifts selfishly, or even turning them against Him, by letting them hide Him from you? Learn a lesson from the bird's-nest, then. If even the love of a bird is sacred, how much more sacred must be the love of God! If it is wrong to abuse her love, how much more wicked must it be to abuse his love! Do not do that. Love Him who first loved you; and then, indeed, it will be well with you, and you shall prolong your days beyond all the days of time.

II.

THE CHILD JESUS:

A PATTERN FOR CHILDREN.

"Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?"—LUKE ii. 49.

IF I were to ask you who was the only perfect man the world has ever seen, you would all reply, "The Man Christ Jesus." And if, again, I asked you whether we who are grown up men and women ought to copy his example, you would say, "Why, of course, you ought." And if, yet once more, I were to ask, And *you*, are you also bound to imitate Him, and to be such children as He was? you would still say, I am sure, "Yes, we are."

But if, made bold by these answers, I were to turn upon you and say: "Very well, then; go, and be such children as Jesus was," I wonder how you would take *that*. Most of you, I suppose, would simply understand that I was bidding you be *good*

children; for you know that He was good, and that only as you are good can you grow like Him. Most of you, I say, would think I only meant "Be good children;" and perhaps, so long as you remembered what I had said, you would try a little harder than usual to do what was right and kind. But there are some of you, I hope, who would not be content with that. You would want to know a little more exactly what I meant. When I said, "Try and be such children as Jesus was," you would say, "And what sort of a child was He? We are told a good deal about what He was as a man; but even the Gospels tell us hardly anything about Him as a boy. *We* should like to know something about his life when He was no older than we are; how He was bred up at home, what sort of school He went to, what lessons He had to learn, and how He learned them; what He tried to make of Himself and to be like. If we could only find out what He was, and what He did, when He was a child, we should be better able to copy his example, and to become such children as He was."

Well, I think I can tell you exactly what you want to know: that is, I think I can tell you what sort of a boy Jesus was, how He was brought up at home, the kind of school He went to, what lessons He had to learn and how He learned them; and, above all, what He tried to make of Himself wherever He went and whatever He did. And I think I can tell you all this because, though the

New Testament says very little about it, yet other books tell us how the Hebrew children of his time were brought up, both at home and at school; and we have every reason to believe that Jesus was brought up as other children were. For the New Testament does at least say this: that his parents were careful to do with and for Him "after the custom of the law;" and as the Mosaic and Rabbinical "law" covered the whole of human life, from the cradle to the grave, it is easy to learn how any child of that time was brought up whose parents were as pious as Joseph and Mary undoubtedly were. But I must not tell you too much, lest you should forget what I say. So let us begin with the life of the child Jesus when He was three years old—younger than the youngest of you, and go on with it until He was thirteen.

I begin when He was three years of age because at that time his nurture, or training, would commence, and commence very much as yours does, by his getting a new dress. Most of you boys can remember, I dare say, what a great day that was for you when you were taken out of petticoats and put into knickerbockers—how your elder brothers, if you had any, laughed at you, and teased you, and yet were very kind to you, and "lined" your new pockets for you with a bit of silver or a few pence. No doubt you felt that you had turned over a new and larger page in your life, and had really come to be somebody at last. Well, when Jesus was full

three years old, that is, on his fourth birthday, He was put for the first time into a little coat, or tunic, and felt, I suppose, as you felt in your new dress, a little strange at first, but also as if He were somehow of more importance than before. But his tunic had a set of fringes, or tassels, fastened to its hem, which had a very solemn and beautiful meaning. Their meaning would be explained to Him, so far as it could be explained to so young a child, by his parents, and would set Him thinking in a much more serious way than any mere change of apparel would be likely to make you think. For these tassels, worn on the hem of the garment, were put there by the command of God Himself. They were made of several threads, one of which was to be of a deep blue colour; and they were intended to remind the children of Israel that God had chosen them to be his people, and that they were bound to keep his commandments. The Pharisees were very proud of these tassels, as indeed they were of everything else which separated them from other men, and wore them very large, as though they would say, "See, what holy men *we* are, and how strictly *we* keep the law!" Jesus wore a tasseled tunic all his life, as every Jew did, and does now (though the modern Jew hides it under his upper garments); and when we read, in the Gospels, of a poor sick woman who came behind Him, and laid her hand on "*the hem* of his garment," we are to understand that it was one of these sacred tassels

that she laid hold of, thinking there might be some "virtue" even in the tassel itself.

Jesus, then, when He was quite a little boy, was put into a new tunic, such "a little coat" as Samuel's mother made for him every year. This tunic had four tassels on its hem, with a bright blue thread running through them; and every time He looked at them, He was reminded that God had chosen Him to be a holy child, and to keep his commandments.

With his new dress, He got a new name. And I can tell you what his mother often called Him, what perhaps she commonly called Him, after He was three years old, and wore his new brave coat. She called Him *Taph;* for that was the Hebrew name for a child of his age. And *Taph* meant "little brother." Up to three years old, the Hebrew child was generally carried by his mother in her arms, or on her hip, or on her shoulder. But, after that, he laid hold of his mother's hand, and trotted by her side. And just as your mother might say to you when you were small, "Come along, Child!" or, "Child, run away!" so Mary would say to Jesus, "Come with me, Taph!" or, "Taph, get ready for school!"

And one of the first lessons the "little brother" would learn at home would be to take great care of his tassels, whatever became of his coat. For all the Jews held them to be sacred; and just as we should be shocked at the mere thought of tossing

about the bread and wine of the Eucharist, so they shrank from defiling or injuring the tassels which, to them, were the signs of a sacrament or covenant with God. How careful they were of them you may learn from a story I will tell you. One of the old Hebrew rabbis was asked "which commandment his father bade him keep more than any other." And he answered, "The commandment about the tassels. Once when my father, on coming down a ladder, stepped on one of the threads and tore it off, he would not leave the place till it was mended." No doubt, then, Jesus was taught to keep his tassels clean and whole, because they were "a sign" to Him, a sign of the obedience He owed to the words of God, and of the blessing He might hope for so long as He obeyed them.

When He was five years old, that is, on his sixth birthday, He would be sent to school, since that was the age at which a Hebrew boy's schooling began. For more than four hundred years before He was born, the Jews had been almost more careful to provide schools for their children, and to get them the best teachers they could, than any modern nation is even now. Wherever there were twenty-five children there was to be a school and a schoolmaster. Where there were as many as forty children, the master was to have an assistant. I believe I can even tell you the very school that Jesus went to. For He was brought up at Nazareth; and in Nazareth there was a synagogue, and in the synagogue there would be

a school. To this school Jesus would, in all probability, be sent when He was full five years old. And at first, if He had not already learned it at home, He would be set to learn the Hebrew alphabet. He would have to say his *Aleph*, *Beth*, *Gimel*, just as you had to say your A, B, C. When He could read a little, He would be set to read from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets; to learn by heart the commandments He was bound to keep, and to say a Psalm now and then, just as now and then you have to repeat a hymn. Till He was ten years old, He would study nothing but the Scriptures. But, after that, He would also study books in which "the traditions of the fathers" were recorded; books, that is, which professed to explain the Scriptures, and to illustrate them with stories and examples. Joseph would take Him down to school every morning; for even the most distinguished men would not eat their breakfast till they had taken their sons to school, so anxious were they that their children should attend regularly and in good time. And then, when class began, Jesus, with the other boys of Nazareth, would read to the Master from scrolls on which were written passages from the Pentateuch, or the Prophets, or the Festival Psalms. While they were reading, or after it, the Master would ask them questions, or let the boys ask questions of him; and often he would tell them pretty stories which brought home to them what they had just read and made it plain.

Would you like to hear what sort of questions the schoolboys had to answer eighteen centuries ago, and what sort of stories their Master told them? Very well, you shall. A rabbi, who lived nearly thirty years before Christ was born, set his pupils thinking by asking them, "What is the best thing for a man to possess?" One of them replied, "A kind nature;" another, "A good companion;" another, "A good neighbour:" but one of them, named Eleazar, said, "A good heart." "I like your answer best, Eleazar," said the Master, "for it includes all the rest." Another of these old Schoolmasters wanted to explain to his class how it was that the people of Israel had been true to God through all the changes and disasters of many centuries, and told them this story or parable:— "There was once a man who betrothed himself to a beautiful maiden, and then travelled into a far country. And the maiden waited and waited for him, but he came not. Friends and rivals mocked her, and said, He will never come. But she went into her room, and took out the letters in which he had promised to be ever faithful. Weeping, she read them, and was comforted. In time he returned: and when he asked her how she had kept her faith so long, she shewed him his letters. So Israel, in misery and captivity, was mocked by the nations for her hope of redemption. But Israel went into her schools and synagogues, and took out the letters God had sent her, *i.e.* the Scriptures, and was com-

forted. In due time God would redeem her, and say, How was it that you, alone and abandoned among the mocking nations, held fast your faith in Me? And then Israel would point to the Scriptures, and say, Had I not your promise here?" Nor were these ancient Masters devoid of wit and humour. They did not scruple to use them. When one of them, for example, was rebuking the self-sufficient temper which leads some boys, as well as some men, to think that nothing can be done well unless *they* have a hand in it, he said: "The sun can get up without *your* help;" which puts one in mind of Mrs. Poyser's cock who thought the sun got up to hear him crow. And another, to rebuke a greedy and grasping temper, the temper which cannot be content with what it has, but is always asking for more, said: "The camel wanted to have horns, and they cut off his ears."

We must conceive of Jesus, then, as hearing such proverbs, and stories, and questions as these, while He studied the Holy Scriptures in the Synagogue school at Nazareth; and as being trained to ask the questions by which He afterwards put gainsayers to silence, and to tell the beautiful parables by which He won the ear of attentive crowds. Till He was twelve years old, He would be learning lessons such as these both of his parents and of his teachers,—growing in wisdom as He grew in stature; learning, above all, to walk humbly with God, and to shew mercy and do kindness to man.

At twelve years of age, a new and very great change would pass upon Him. He would no longer be called *Taph*, or "little brother." He would be called *Elem*, or "strong boy:" and when He had completed his twelfth year, on his thirteenth birthday, He would be recognized as a young man, and called "a son of the law." For, at this time, every Hebrew lad had his fate put into his own hands, and became responsible for his own actions. Up to this time his parents were held to be responsible for him: now he had to answer for himself both to man and to God. On the morning of this day he put on for the first time the two phylacteries which every Jew wore when he prayed, one on the head, and the other on the left arm. These phylacteries were small square boxes made of parchment, which were attached to the arm and the forehead by long slender straps: in each box there were four tiny cells; and in each cell there was put a strip of vellum on which was written a passage from the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy (Ex. xiii. 2–10; 11–16: and Deut. xi. 13–22; vi. 4–9). On his thirteenth birthday, before morning prayer, the lad put on, first, the phylactery for the left arm, saying: "Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who hast sanctified us with thy commandments, and enjoined us to put on phylacteries." Then he put on the phylactery for the forehead, and uttered a similar thanksgiving. From this moment he was regarded as "a son of the law," or "a son of the commandments;" *i.e.* he was

bound to keep all the commandments of God; bound, therefore, to be always about his Father's business, doing God's will in whatever he did; bound also to go up to Jerusalem at the annual Feasts, and to sit at the feet of the Temple doctors.

The first Sabbath after He had assumed the phylacteries was another great and marked day in his life; a day which I suspect many a Hebrew lad looked forward to with no little fear and trembling. For on this Sabbath he was called up, during the public worship of the Synagogue, to read one of the lessons for the day. The sacred scroll was put into his hand; and when he had found the place where he was to read, he had to say, "Blessed be the Lord, who is blessed for ever." The Congregation responded, "Blessed be the Lord, who is blessed for evermore." Then the lad said: "Blessed art Thou, O Lord God, King of the Universe, who hast chosen us from all nations, and hast given us thy law. Blessed art Thou, O Lord, Giver of the law." And all the Congregation responded "Amen." He then read the lesson for the day, rolled up the scroll, handed it to the minister, and said aloud: "Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, who hast given us thy law, the law of truth, and hast planted among us everlasting life. Blessed art Thou, O Lord, Giver of the law." From this time forward he was held to be a man, though of course a very young man, and a member of the Israelitish Church.

Now we may be pretty sure that the parents of

Jesus, who scrupulously did for Him "according to the custom of the law," omitted none of these customs or ceremonies. As the solemn day of his personal dedication to the service of Jehovah drew near, they would present Him with the phylacteries. On the morning of his thirteenth birthday he would be called to the Daily Prayer, and would put on his phylacteries with the usual forms; blessing God that He too was set apart to the obedience of the commandments. On the following Sabbath they would take Him to the Synagogue; and there, when the Liturgy ordered the first lesson of the day to be read, He would be summoned by the minister, who was probably his schoolmaster, to stand up and read. The Scroll, on which the Law was written, would be placed in his hands. He would turn the roller round and round till He came to the passage He was to read. He would call on the Congregation to bless the Lord. He would Himself bless the great King of the Universe. He would read the lesson, hand back the scroll to the minister, and once more bless God for having given the law and planted everlasting life among his people. And then He would sit down beside Joseph, flushed and excited perhaps by his first public appearance, but with a deep and reverent sense of the solemn vocation—obedience to the Divine Will—to which He had now pledged Himself.

I have now told you the story of Jesus Christ as a

Child, from his fourth to his thirteenth birthday. I have told you what He learned from his parents, what sort of school He went to, what kind of lessons He was taught; and how at last He was publicly recognized as "a son of the law" and a member of the holy commonwealth of Israel. I have not told you half I might have told you about Him—how, for instance, He learned to write and count, and perhaps also to speak Greek; but this, I think, will be enough. For I have still to shew you how He profited above his fellows by all this teaching; and in what sense, therefore, He is a pattern and example to you.

Mark, first, then, that the Child Jesus was *a diligent scholar*. He did not "hate" to go to school. He did not neglect his tasks, or slur them over anyhow, or think, as perhaps some of you think, that getting out of school was the best part of the whole business. We might be quite sure that He diligently attended to the wise rabbis who asked and answered questions, who uttered so many wise and witty proverbs, and told so many pretty stories, if only because He Himself was, in after years, so wise in asking and answering questions, and spoke so many proverbs and parables which the world will never let die. But we can do more and better than merely infer what a good scholar He was. We can see Him, while He was yet a lad, *going to school of his own accord*, and staying in it when He might have been climbing the hills or running through the fields with

his friends. For when Joseph and Mary brought Him up all the way from Nazareth to Jerusalem, He was so charmed to listen to what the wise men of Jerusalem had to say, that He staid on in the Temple three days after his parents had left the city. And it was not to see the beautiful courts and colonnades of the Temple, all overlaid with marble and gold, that He staid; nor to listen to the exquisite singing of the choirs, nor to see the priests offering sacrifices on the altars: much less was it to gaze on the wonders of the streets, the markets, the bazaars. He staid simply that He might sit at the feet, *i.e.* attend the classes, of the learned and venerable doctors of the Jerusalem schools, both asking them questions and answering the questions they asked of Him. So docile was He, and so earnest; so wise and searching were the questions He asked and the answers He gave, that "all who heard Him were astonished at his understanding and answers."

Here, then, was a lad who valued knowledge and wisdom so highly, that He went to school of his own free will; nay, even went to school *while out on a holiday;* and was so engrossed by what He was learning that He let his parents start for home without Him, and hardly seems to have known that they were gone.

Mark, again, that this good scholar was also *a good son.* The Hebrew boys of our Lord's time were very well bred. They were taught good manners, as well as good morals. They were enjoined, both by

their parents and their masters, to salute every one they met in the street, to say to him, "Peace be with thee." To break this rule of courtesy, they were told, was as wrong as to steal. And the boy Jesus was well brought up, and was full of courtesy and kindness, and good-will; for, not only did He grow in favour with men in general, but He had a large circle of kinsfolk and friends who loved Him, and were glad to have Him with them. When Joseph and Mary left Jerusalem, while He, unknown to them, tarried behind them, they were not at all anxious about Him at first; for they said, "No doubt He is with some of our kinsfolk or acquaintance" (Luke ii. 44). So that we know there were many who loved Jesus for his amiable qualities and good manners, and who were charmed to have Him with them.

We know, too, that He had never grieved his parents before, in his eagerness to learn, He let them go on their way home without Him. For when they had found Him in the Temple, they were so astonished that He should have given them the pain of seeking Him sorrowfully, that they cannot blame Him as for a fault, but can only ask Him why He has treated them thus. He must indeed have been a good son to whom his mother could speak as Mary spoke to Jesus. Nay, even after He had become "a son of the law," even after He had learned in the Temple that He was the Son of God, we are told that He left the doctors from whom He

had learned so much, and the Temple which He felt to be his Father's house, went down to Nazareth with Joseph and Mary, "and was *subject* unto them." He did not throw off all obedience and respect for them so soon as He was independent of them. He loved them as well as ever, and was as submissive to their will.

And, lastly, this good scholar and good son was *a good child of God*. He was always "about his Father's business." He felt that He *must* be about it, wherever He went, whatever He did—at home and at school, in the street and the synagogue, as well as in the Temple, when He worked and when He played. The one great thing He had to do, the one thing which above all others He tried to do, was to serve God his Father; not simply to become wise, and still less to please Himself, but to please God by growing wise in the knowledge and obedience of his commandments.

And now, my dear children, I think I have fulfilled my promise to you, and have put you in a corner from which you cannot well get out. Before now, when I have said to you, "Try to be such children as Jesus was," the more attentive and thoughtful of you may have said within yourselves, "But we don't know what sort of child He was, and therefore we don't at all exactly know what you would have us try to be and do!" You cannot say that any more; for I have shewn you what sort of child Jesus was,

and how He was brought up. I have shewn you that He was very diligent at school, and learned all He could; that He was obedient to his parents, and submitted his will to their will: and that He loved God with all his heart, and tried in all He did to serve and honour Him. So that now when I say, "Follow Christ; try to be such children as He was," you understand that there are at least three things in which you may imitate Him. You understand, first, that you are to be diligent in your school tasks and studies, to learn as much as you can and as well as you can. You understand, secondly, that you are to honour and obey your parents—when they are absent as well as when they are present, when you grow up as well as while you are dependent on them. And you understand, thirdly, that you are to make the doing of God's will your chief "business," your chief aim in all you do, because He *is* your Father and loves you, and because you love Him for his great love to you. And if you try to love and serve Him, God will help you; and Christ Himself will say to you, "You are my brothers, and my sisters; for you also do the will of my Father who is in heaven."

III.

CHILDREN AT PLAY.

"But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the market-places, who call unto their fellows, and say, We piped unto you, and ye did not dance; we wailed, and ye did not beat your breasts."—MATTHEW xi. 16, 17.

THE children of two thousand years ago were very like the children of to-day even in their sports. That is to say, the children whom Jesus watched and loved and blessed, were very much what you boys and girls are in their love of play, and in the games they played at, and in the tempers they shewed while playing at these games. Then, as now, when a number of children came together, and especially when they came together out of doors, they found it impossible to sit still or to stand still; they began to play together either at some old traditional game, or at some game invented on the spur of the moment. And, whatever the game, there was pretty

sure to be some mimicry in it, some quaint imitation or some comical burlesque of what they had seen their elders do. Here, in England, a bevy of girls will often give a dolls' party, or get up a tea-party of their own, at which they use tiny cups and plates that will hold next to nothing; and at these parties they go gravely through all the forms they have seen their seniors observe when *they* drink tea with each other. Or a lot of boys will arm themselves with sticks instead of swords and guns, and play at being soldiers: one or two will go in front playing imaginary fifes and drums; another will make a flag out of his pocket-handkerchief; another will strut at the side, looking very fierce and shouting out words of command: while the bulk of them will form up and march in step, looking—and, I dare say, partly feeling—as if they were going to conquer the world, and could eat all the enemies they killed. If, while I am writing in my library, I hear an unusual boyish din, and look out of the window into the public walk by which my house stands, I often see a troop of lads flourishing about, evidently under the impression that they are *Robin Hoods* on active service, and are going to make short work with the foe. And there, in Judea and Galilee, two thousand years ago, the children did very much what you do to-day. They imitated their elders. They got up processions. Sometimes, no doubt, they played at being soldiers—stately Roman legionaries, or wild brigand-looking "Zealots;" and at other times they got up a wedding or a funeral.

Now it happened one day that the Lord Jesus, as He passed through the streets and bazaars of a Galilean town, came on a number of children who were thus employed. Many people were about Him, and He was teaching them as He went. But, all the while, He kept his eye on the children, and marked what they were about. And, by and bye, He shewed how closely He had marked them by bringing them and their games into his talk. He pointed the men who were about Him to their children, told *them* to look at them, and said that *they* were just like the children at whom they looked. I make no doubt that our Lord watched the children with much interest and pleasure; that He liked to see them play—as He likes to see children play now, if only they do it with good humour and spirit. Nor do I doubt that He was a little amused, as we should have been,—amused, and yet a little sorry, when some of the children turned cross, and refused to play at any game that could be proposed to them.

I dare say that, if some of you know, others of you would like to know, what these children were playing at, and how the game went. I will tell you, though of course I was not there. They played, first, at a wedding; and, then, at a funeral. And we cannot wonder that they chose these two ceremonies for imitation. For a Jewish wedding was then, as to this day an Eastern wedding is, a very gay spectacle, sure to seize the fancy of children. The bridegroom, and the young men who accompanied him, were

tricked out in their best and brightest robes; and they went in public procession, with music and with perfumes floating in the air, to fetch the bride to her new home. For many days after the wedding open house was kept. There was much mirth and feasting. The friends of the wedded pair went, with trains of their kinsfolk and servants, to carry them their presents, or to pay calls of ceremony and congratulation. The whole town was alive with music and dancing and feasting; and in the streets gay companies were continually passing to and fro. That was thought a very poor marriage, the festivities of which were not kept up for at least a week.

So, again, a Jewish funeral must have been a very striking and dramatic spectacle to children. The body was carried by on an open bier, so that all could see it. And not only did the kinsfolk and friends of the dead man follow him to the grave with the most extravagant expressions of grief; but they were foolish enough to hire professional mourners, who tore their hair, and beat their breasts, and raised a keen cry or wail,—just as here, in England, we are foolish enough to hire mutes, and all the other mummeries of the undertaker, to shew our affection and respect for the dead. Now children who saw these sad processions constantly going about the streets—the dead body on the open bier, the friends weeping, the hired mourners striking their breasts, tearing their hair, throwing up their heads and howling more like dogs than human beings—the children could not fail

to be impressed by the dramatic features of the scene, and were likely enough to imitate and burlesque it in their play.

This was what the children whom Jesus watched had been doing. First, they had said, "Let's play at marrying!" And then the more forward and lively children of the company began to march, and to move their fingers up and down as if they were stopping and unstopping the holes of a flute. One of them, no doubt, was chosen to personate the bridegroom, and others to stand for the "sons of the bride-chamber," *i.e.* the young men who accompanied him: and off they started, as though to fetch the bride home, expecting that the rest of the children would follow, dancing and shouting, and pretending to carry torches, or to let off fire-works, or to prance about and to shew their skill in using their weapons. But those who should have filled this part, declined to fill it. They were sulky, and would not play at *this* game; perhaps because their part in it was not the best part. If they had been selected to play bridegroom and bridesmen, or even if they had been told to go first and play the flute, they might have liked the game well enough. But to come last, and only dance and shout, like the general company, did not please them at all. And so the cheerful children have to say to the sulky ones, and we can see that they say it with some surprise and meant no harm: "Why, what's the matter? *We fluted to you, and ye did not dance!*"

Then they thought they would try another game. Perhaps the first was too lively; they will take a graver tone. And so they say, "Let's play at burying,"—and off they go like bearers of the bier, or like the hired mourners, walking with folded hands and downcast heads, but every now and then flinging up their heads, and howling, O so dreadfully! that they may make their companions laugh. But their companions *won't* laugh, and won't play. This game does not suit them either. For, again, the first place is not assigned to them. The children who propose the game instinctively begin it—wailing like the hired mourners, and expecting their "fellows" to smite their breasts like the true mourners. But the sulky children think they ought to have been asked to go first and howl: *that* would have been better fun for them, and a better place. And so the livelier, the merry good-tempered, children have to turn upon them and say, "Whatever is the matter with you to-day? *We wailed, and ye did not beat your breasts!*"

And now I think you begin to see what I meant when I said that the children of two thousand years ago, not only played the same sort of games that you do, but played them in the same temper and spirit. For *you* all know bright good-humoured children who are ready to play at almost any game that others like, and are very pleasant "obliging fellows." And, I am afraid, you all know "touchy" children, who are apt to turn cross and sulky when they are

"touched" or "stroked the wrong way;" and who do not care to play at any game unless *they* propose it, or unless they are to take a leading part in it. You have all seen girls who, on slight provocation, shake themselves, and cry, "Sha'n't" to anything you propose. And, indeed, often when I am walking in the streets or fields, I hear that detestable "*Sha'n't! No, I sha'n't! Sha'n't, I tell you!*" till it makes me quite miserable to think how miserable children make themselves and others, when they might be as happy as the day is long, if they were not so cross and selfish. It is from these cross children, too, that I often hear that other and still more detestable phrase, "*I'll tell Ma!*" If anything goes wrong with them, if they are hurt however unintentionally, if they are put upon or think themselves put upon, away they go, wailing out "I'll tell Ma," and blubbering and howling, till one's fingers itch to know what their ears are made of. Happily "Ma" is often a sensible woman, and instead of cosseting and cuddling them, bids them behave "like a little man," or contrives to make the house hotter for them than the garden or the field, so that they are glad to get out again and try what a sweeter temper will do for them.

Now if the children who were playing in the market-place so many hundred years ago, if they had known that Jesus was watching them; if, moreover, they had known who He was—how kind, how good, how happy in their happiness—*do* you think

that any of them would have turned sulky, and have refused to play either at this game or that? I am sure you do not think they would. You are sure that if only they had known Him, and known that He was watching them, when the other children marched off playing their imaginary flutes, they would have begun to jump and dance, and shout and sing, as if they were going to a wedding: and when the others began to wail and lament, like the hired mourners at a funeral, they would have pulled a long face, and beat their breasts, and tugged their hair, as if they were reckless with grief. And if, when you are playing with your companions, *you* knew that the Lord Jesus had his kind eyes upon you, and would be pleased to see you bright and friendly and obliging, would you turn sulky and say "Sha'n't!" or go crying off with that dismal "I'll tell Ma"? I am sure you would not. And, therefore, I want you to know, and to remember, that He *is* looking down upon you from heaven when you play as well as when you are doing your tasks; that He sees you in the playground as well as in school, in street and field as well as in Church; that He takes notice of what you say and do; and that He is pleased when you are easy to please, and sorry when you are sulky and *will* have your own way.

There are times with you all when you want to be good and to please Him. But sometimes you say, "I am but a child, and can't do much;" and sometimes you think that you can only please Him by

saying your prayers, by learning your lessons, by taking part in the worship of his House. You would like, you think, to be able to serve Him in other ways, and to do more for Him. But you hardly ever suppose that you can serve and please Him as you play together, when you laugh and run, jump and shout. Now that is a great mistake. You can please your Friend and Saviour just as much in your games as in your work, when you romp and frolic as when you read the Bible or say your prayers. Indeed you ought to read the Bible and say your prayers in order to learn how you may please Him in all you do, and be able to do it. What he really cares for, is not so much what you are doing, as *how* you do it. If when you play, you shew a kind, cheerful, unselfish spirit; if you keep your temper when you are vexed or hurt; if you can take the second, or even the last place in a game as well as the first, or stand out of it for a while that some other "fellow" may have a turn; if you are almost as glad when your companions play well and enjoy themselves as when you play well and enjoy yourself; if you can bear to be beaten without getting angry, and to win without bragging—why, then, you please Christ, and shew that it is not for nothing that you have read the Bible and said your prayers. But if you turn sulky or cross when you lose a game; or if you are self-conceited, if, for instance, when you boys play cricket, you go bouncing and bragging about what a good innings you have made, or if you

always find some exquisite and impossible reason why you got out and another lad made a big score; or if you are quick to think your playmates deal unfairly by you: if you are for ever grumbling and murmuring, extolling yourselves and depreciating others—why, then, you displease Him, and shew that you have not read your Bible and said your prayers to much effect.

So that, if you want to be good children, as I believe you do; if you wish to find out some way in which you may prove that you love God and try to serve Him, here is the very thing you are looking for. Serve Him when you play. Serve Him by shewing a generous, obliging, and cheerful temper in your games. Do not insist on having your own way, and taking the first place. Remember that your playmates have their wishes and their claims as well as you; and, so far as you can and may, yield to their wishes, concede their claims. For thus you will serve and please both God and them.

But is this the only lesson we are to learn from the Children playing in the Galilean market-place? No, it is neither the only lesson, nor the best. It will, indeed, do much to make you and those about you happy, if you learn to play in the right spirit. But the great thing is to have a spirit right with God and man at all times, and under all changes. And this is the lesson which Christ Himself has made these Children teach us.

To the men who were listening to Him He said:

"You are like the children over there in the market. Nothing pleases you. Whatever the form in which God speaks to you, you refuse to hear and learn. By John the Baptist He spoke to you with grave austerity, and you would not mourn when He lamented over you. You said: 'John! O, John has a devil, a gloomy devil. *He* cannot have come from God.' By me He speaks to you in all tender, friendly, and gracious tones; but even to my fluting you will not dance. You say: 'The Son of Man is a glutton and a winebibber. *He* cannot have come from God.' You are like the sulky children who will not play whether at a wedding or a funeral. The fault is not in the games, but in the children. And the fault is in *you*, not in the Baptist or the Son of Man. You hate the truth: *that* is what is wrong: and, therefore, you reject it, whatever the form in which it appeals to you."

This is the spirit we are *not* to shew. We are to shew the very opposite spirit. Instead of hating the truth, and refusing to listen to it, whenever or however God speaks to us, we are to love the truth, and to welcome it, whatever the form or the tone it takes.

Did you, children, ever consider in how many ways God speaks to you? He speaks to you here, in his House, by my voice. He speaks to you by the lips of your teachers in the School. He speaks to you whenever you pray, whenever you read the Bible; whenever any good book or word sets you

thinking of Him, and of your duty to Him. But He also speaks to you every day and all day long,—in the pleasure that comes to you when you have done any duty from the heart or have shewn any kindness to others; and in the pain you feel when you have been selfish or unkind. He speaks to you by father and mother, companion and friend; when you are sick and wonder what will become of you if you should die, and when you are strong and glow with health and gratitude and gladness. Nay, as you have just heard, He speaks to you by your very games; in the happiness you feel when you play in a cheerful and generous temper, and in the wretchedness you feel when you are sulky and obstinate and self-willed. And I want you to ask yourselves very seriously, whether you have listened, or shewn any disposition to listen, to his voice; or whether, like the men whom He rebuked by their own children, you have refused to listen to Him, although He has spoken to you in ways so many and so various.

But, perhaps, *you* want to know how you are to tell whether you have listened to Him or not?

You may tell by this. If you really love truth; if, that is, you are honestly and heartily trying to be good and to do God's will, then you may be sure that you have listened to his Voice. For what He means when He speaks to you is: "Be good; be kind; do my will; grow like Jesus Christ, in whom I have shewn you what my will is, and how

beautiful it is. Trust *Him;* follow Him; obey Him. And then, since He always did my will, and never at any time transgressed my commandment, you may be sure that you are doing it too." This is what God means whenever, and however, He speaks to you. And there is no one of you so young, or so poorly taught, but that you can try yourself by this test, and judge whether you have in any measure listened to God's voice, and learned the lesson He is always trying to teach you.

Put yourselves to this test, then. Ask yourselves: "Am I really trying to do God's will and to love it, as Jesus did? Whether I work or play, do I try to shew the kindly, unselfish, cheerful temper which He approves?" Many of you, I hope, can say that you are trying to shew this temper, though you often fail, and that you are very sorry when you fail. If you can, take heart, and try again; try afresh every day. You may be sure that God loves you for trying; and that, as you are looking to Him for help, He will help you until you succeed. And if you have not tried, or have not tried habitually and seriously, begin at once. For God loves *you*, too, though He is sorry that you do not try to please Him, and wants you to begin, and has sent me to ask you to begin without delay. He is speaking to you at this moment by me. And I hope, O, I hope, that you will listen to Him, and begin your effort to serve and please Him now, by asking Him for the help and grace without which it is impossible

to please Him; and that you will go on trying to serve Him as long as you live. For, then, instead of being like the sulky children who would not play at either game; instead of being like the sinful men who would listen neither to the Baptist nor to Christ; you will be like the gracious Saviour who loved both the children and their parents, and who loves you quite as much as He loved them.

IV.

ON CUTTING DITCHES.

"And he said, Thus saith the Lord, Make this valley full of ditches: for thus saith the Lord, Ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain; yet this valley shall be filled with water, that ye may drink, both ye, and your cattle and your beasts."—2 KINGS iii. 16, 17.

HEN you look at a map of ancient Palestine, almost the first thing that strikes you is, that the country is split from top to bottom by a deep cleft, through which the river Jordan rolls—swelling at the north into the Lake of Gennesaret, and losing itself at the south in the Dead Sea. On the left of the river you see a long slip of land which is divided into two kingdoms, the Kingdom of Israel at the top of the map, and the Kingdom of Judah at the bottom. If you glance at the other side, the right hand side, of the river, you see that the mountains and downs on a level with Judah are

marked as the Kingdom of Moab; while if you look down quite to the bottom of the map, below the Dead Sea, you find some mountain ranges over which the word *Edom* is written.

I think you all know enough of the geography of the Bible to be familiar with these facts: most of you, I dare say, could point out the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, Moab and Edom: and these are the only geographical facts you need to bear in mind while I tell you a story from the Bible which many of you possibly never heard before.

Nearly nine hundred years before the birth of Christ, *i.e.* nearly three thousand years ago, Joram, the King of Israel, was very much affronted because Mesha, the King of Moab, refused to pay to *him* the tribute which he had always paid to his father. He took the affront so much to heart that he resolved to go to war with the King of Moab, and *make* him pay the tribute which he would not give,—that tribute being (if there is no mistake in the figures) a hundred thousand lambs every year, and the wool shorn from a hundred thousand rams. But while Joram was fighting across the river in Moab, the King of Judah might come up from the south, and invade his defenceless kingdom. To make himself safe, therefore, he asked the King of Judah to go with him to the war, and take part in it. Now the people of Moab had been very bad neighbours to Judah, as well as to Israel; and, therefore, Jehoshaphat, the King of Judah, was quite willing to join

Joram in making war upon them. But the King of Judah also had to the south of him neighbours who might take advantage of his absence to invade the land; *viz.* the people of Edom, who dwelt among the lofty and richly coloured ranges below the Dead Sea. He therefore proposed that the King of Edom should be asked to join them; nor could he very well refuse to do so, as at this time the King of Edom was only a kind of deputy king, appointed by Jehoshaphat himself.

So these three kings—the kings of Israel, of Judah, and of Edom—agreed to unite their forces, and to invade the country of Moab. When they had thus agreed together, the first question they had to settle was *by which way* they should advance upon the enemy. For there were two ways open to them; and of these two ways one was very much shorter and easier than the other. The short and easy way would have been for all three armies to meet a little above Jerusalem, to cross the Fords of the Jordan, to march along the other side of the River, and so to come upon Moab from the north. But there was at least one very grave objection to taking this way. Though it was the easiest way to get to Moab, it was by far the hardest when you got there. For the Moabites, knowing this to be their exposed side, had strongly fortified it, and were always on the watch to repel any assault. Hence the three kings seem to have thought that, after all, the longest way round would be the shortest way there. In any case they

resolved that they would approach Moab on the opposite, or southern, border; a border so well protected by nature, and so difficult of access that the Moabites had not fortified it, and would be likely not to guard it at all, or to guard it carelessly.

But, to reach Moab in this way, the three kings would have to face many difficulties and hardships. First, two of them, the kings of Israel and Judah, would have to march large armies all the way down to Edom, crossing a bit of the Desert, and climbing the mountain passes. Then, when they left Edom, all three of the armies would have to march through a dangerous country, with great mountains to climb and stony barren valleys to cross, where, if they had no fighting to do, they would have many natural obstacles to encounter; and where, above all, it would be very hard to transport provisions for so large a host. Nevertheless, they determined to take this way; and took it. For seven days all went fairly well with them. They marched over the passes, and along stony mountain valleys, finding the heat very oppressive no doubt, and losing many of the cattle and water-skins with which they had started, but always having enough to drink. Then they reached a deep rocky valley, which the Arabs of to-day call Wady *el Ahsy*, where no doubt they expected to find an abundance of water, since this valley drained the mountain ranges both of Edom and of Moab, and there ran through it a stream which was commonly full at all seasons of the year.

It had been an exceptionally hot season, I suppose; for, to their horror as well as surprise, they found the bed of the river quite dry. Job tells us how, in the East, "the caravans divert their track," go out of their way, that is, to reach some well-known stream; and how, when they find it dried up by the heat, they are overwhelmed with fear and despair. And we can easily understand how, when the great army of the three kings found themselves in this sultry stony valley, with the mountains rising round them and shutting them in, and saw nothing but the dry bed of the river littered with stones where they had hoped to see a broad stream leaping, and falling, and whitening against the rocks, they would be tempted to give up all for lost.

Even the kings themselves were moved to despair. "Alas," cried the King of Israel, "that the Lord hath called these three kings to deliver them into the hand of Moab!" But the King of Judah will not quite give up hope. "Perhaps," he says, "there is a prophet in the camp. And, perhaps, if there be, he can tell us how to escape even so great a danger as this."

There *was* a prophet in the camp; and no less a prophet than Elisha, though one a little wonders how he got there. And when the kings came and consulted him, Elisha called for a minstrel that, as he listened to the sweet notes of the harp, his mind might be raised and strengthened and composed; that the secret order and harmony of the music

might pass into his soul, and make it a fit instrument for the Spirit of God. As the harper harped "the hand of the Lord came upon Elisha," and struck spiritual notes, notes of wisdom and counsel, out of him. In a vision the Prophet foresaw that that very night heavy storms of rain would beat and break on the mountains of Moab; that the water which fell on those mountains would rapidly drain down into the Wady in which the army was encamped; that in the night they would hear a loud and sudden torrent roaring down the river bed which was now empty; and that the torrent would pass almost as quickly as it came, unless some means were taken so to collect and store up its waters as that they should not escape. "*Cut ditches*," he cried: "dig trenches; *fill* the valley with them; and though you hear no wind, and see no rain, yet in the morning this parched valley shall stand thick with pools, and even this thirsty land shall slake your thirst."

For once they listened to good counsel. Though the sun burned on, and no clouds gathered round the mountain peaks, and no cool wind announced a coming storm, they dug on far into the night, cutting trenches in the red earth and sand of the valley. And when the day broke, as soon as they had laid the morning sacrifice on the altar, the river came rushing down *in spate*, leaping and foaming and roaring, overflowing its banks, and filling all the trenches with its fresh cool life.

Nor was even this all that they gained by taking the Prophet's advice. For, despite their precautions, the Moabites had heard of the advance of the three kings from Edom in time to shift their troops from the northern to the southern border of their land. These troops were now drawn up on the shoulder of a mountain that looked down into the valley in which the invading army was encamped. They knew that the stream in that valley had run dry. And so when the morning dawned, and the sun rose and was redly reflected from the water that lay in the trenches, they never suspected it was *water* that they saw. "O," they cried, "look at the pools of blood! The three kings have fallen out. They have fought each other in the night. Let us sweep down upon them, and secure the spoil." So they came rushing down the mountain slope, expecting an easy victory; and only discovered when it was too late that the hostile army was drawn up in battle array to receive them. Taken by surprise, outnumbered and outmanœuvred, they were easily defeated and slain. Thus the trenches dug in the valley, not only saved the Israelites and their confederates from perishing of thirst, but also gave them the victory over their foes.

Now I dare say some of you, my dear children, are saying to yourselves: "That's a very pretty story, though it's such an old story; but what is it *to us?* what does it mean and teach? What have

we been told it *for?*" For you know that I do not tell you stories — at least in this place — simply because they are pretty, but because I think they have some good lesson for you. And I make no doubt that, at first, you will be surprised to hear that I have told you this old story out of the Bible because it sets forth the main aspect and duty of your life, so long as you are children; and because I hope it will help you to do your proper work, both at home and at school, more cheerfully and more diligently.

If I were to tell you at once, and without explanation, that *your main business in life is to cut ditches in dry valleys*, very likely some of you would laugh, and some would be puzzled, and all of you, I hope, would end by asking me what I meant. I will try and tell you what I should mean, what I do mean.

1. Now, mark. This great army, shut up in the dry and thirsty valley, had to dig ditches, to cut trenches, which were to hold a water they could not see, no trace or sign of which they could see. No rain was falling on the mountains; no cold damp wind was blowing, and foretelling, as it blew, the approach of rain. So that they had to dig on at what seemed a useless task; they had to cut trenches, though there was no water to run into them, and no sign that any water was coming, in pure faith that what the Prophet told them would turn out true, and that the water would come if

only the trenches were dug. I can well believe that when the Prophet said *Dig*, more than one gruff veteran of the camp said, "*I* dig, when I am so weary and like to die of thirst! I am not such a fool. What does Elisha know of the weather? Can't I, who have seen more of the weather than he has, read the signs as well as he? There is not a cloud in the sky, nor is there a breath of air to cool the intolerable heat of this stony wilderness. Let others dig if they will; I will not." And yet, reasonable as this man's argument and resolve would seem at the moment, you know that he would have been wholly in the wrong; and that, after all, it was much more reasonable to believe what the Prophet said, with whom was the word of the Lord, and to act on the counsel he gave.

But if these soldiers were called to a task which seemed at the time quite useless and unreasonable, are not *you* called to such tasks every day? And if they had to obey the call because they trusted the words of one who was wiser than they were, are not you every day called to trust in the wisdom and kindness of those who know more of human life than you do, and who are seeking to equip and prepare you for it?

Why, see, how many things you have to do at home, which you do not in the least like to do, simply because your father and mother know it will be best for you to do them. Some of you don't like to get up when you are called; and hardly any of

you, I am afraid, like to go to bed so soon as you are told to go. You often want to eat viands which you are not allowed to eat, or to read books which you are not allowed to read, or to play when you are compelled to work. You are taught not to use words you would like to use, and not to indulge tempers and passions which you would like to indulge. From the very first your parents have to say to you, "Come," "Go," "Do this," or "Don't do that." Every day, and all day long, unless you have learned to rule yourselves and to find pleasure in doing your duty, you have to be checked, guided, persuaded, punished even: and all for what? To you it must often seem unreasonable that you should be told to do this when you don't at all want to do it, and not to do that when that is exactly what you most want to do. You don't see any sense in all this, any more than the Hebrew soldiers saw any sense in being set to dig trenches in a dry valley when there was no sign of rain. But there *was* sense, and very good sense, in the command which, whether they liked it or not, they had to obey. And, as a rule, there is very good sense in the commands and prohibitions given to you. What your parents are really aiming at, though you may not see it, is to get you to form habits, good habits, and to train capacities, which by and bye, when you are grown men and women, will be of the greatest service to you. They want you to learn to rule and restrain yourselves while you are young, because they know

you *must* be able to rule and restrain yourselves if you are to live usefully and happily, if you are not to be passionate and sinful, miserable and degraded. They want you to be thoughtful, obedient, diligent, well-spoken and well-mannered, gentle and considerate for others, because they know that these habits and ways will be most useful to you by and bye; because if you do not acquire them now, you will suffer for it as long as you live. In short, they set you to dig trenches the use of which you cannot see, because by and bye these trenches will be filled with a water that will strengthen and refresh you as long as you walk the earth, and even prepare you to breathe the air and share the blessedness of heaven.

I should very much like to make you see, or to believe, that this *is* their aim for you, because it will be such a help and comfort to you in your present tasks and disappointments. If you say, as I have heard some boys say even of their parents: "They're always bothering me. I mustn't do this, and I mustn't do that: they never let me do what I like;" if you think or feel like that, your life cannot be of much worth or pleasure to you. But if you can say: "Well, well, I wish they would let me alone; but I suppose it's all right, and that I shall be the better for it some day. If I must dig my ditch, I may as well do it cheerfully; so here goes for another spadeful,"—why, even you yourselves can see that your life would grow very much happier to you: and *I* can tell you that into these ditches

which you are digging, into these good habits that you are forming, the power of a fine and noble character will one day sweep down like a full stream, and you will be the better for them all your life long, and the better able to serve your neighbours.

2 Again, consider your life at school. I am always a little sorry for children who have to go to school, and yet do not take kindly to the place, or to anything they learn in it—they are so miserable, and to them it seems so unreasonable that they should be mewed up in close crowded rooms poring over books the very sight of which they hate, when every drop of blood in their bodies is calling out for green fields, and rough games, and fresh air. But if any of *you* dislike school and learning, you may be sure that you are sent to school only for your good. You don't suppose, do you, that anybody *likes* to teach children who do not want to learn? or that your parents or your teachers hate you so much that they all conspire to do what they do not like to do, simply in order to make you miserable? They *can* have no motive but your welfare.

No doubt it is very hard for you to grind on at your grammar, or arithmetic, or algebra, your Latin and Greek, or your music and drawing. Some of you, perhaps, do not see what is the use of your mastering all these dry rules, or plodding through all those uninteresting exercises. You would like to fling your books out of the windows, and to go after them. But you may see, if you try, that what you

are really doing in your school work is this: You are digging ditches—very dry ditches some of them seem to you no doubt—into which by and bye the living water of Knowledge will run, filling them to the very brim. What would you think of a grown man who could not read, or who could not open his lips without breaking some rule of grammar? and, if you did not care about it, what would other and more sensible people think of him? And how are *you* to grow up into pleasant people, or even into good men of business, if you do not get hold of such things as writing, arithmetic, grammar, geography, if you do not learn to be orderly, and diligent, and thoughtful? How are you to read good books, and take your part in conversation, and profit by all that you hear and see and read, if you do not open and train your minds while you are young? You have to be men and women; and if you do not learn and get quick and bright while you are at school, when you grow into men and women, you will be stupid and awkward; people will be sorry for you, or they will laugh at you, and play tricks on you, and take advantage of you; a thousand times over you will be made to look like a fool, or a clown, when you would give all the world, if you had it, to be quick, intelligent, well-mannered, and equal to the occasion.

Would your father and mother, then, be shewing any true love for you if they were to let you grow up as ignorant and silly as you must do were they not to put you to school, and make you learn lessons,

though you don't like them? Nay, are you shewing any real love for yourselves if, however little you like School work, you do not set yourselves to do it with all your heart? An intelligent and educated man, or woman, finds knowledge and amusement everywhere: but how are you to be educated and intelligent if you will not learn? The world is full of living water; but it runs very quickly by, and only those who have dug trenches that will hold it will be much the better for it. Try to remember this; and when you are next put to any School task which you do not like and the use of which you do not see, say within yourselves: "Never mind; my book is my spade; and I've got to dig a trench with it: some day, when I am thirsty, I may find it full of bright sparkling water."

3 I have only one thing more to say to you, but it is by far the most important of all. I know you do not dislike coming to *our* School. It makes me very happy to see that you are glad to come. But, nevertheless, you may not all of you understand what is the use, what the good, of the lessons we try to teach you, and of the religious habits in which we try to train you. But here, too, you and we are digging ditches, cutting trenches, and trenches which we hope will one day be filled with the very water of life.

You come here Sunday after Sunday; and we pray with you, and teach you to pray for yourselves: we sing hymns of praise to God with you: we teach

you to read and to remember the holy words of Scripture, and try to shew you what they mean, and how they bear on your lives, and what is the secret of their power. And, for long, you do not perceive what it all means, what we are driving at, how you will be the better for it. What it means is this: we are preparing channels through which one day the Spirit of God may flow into your hearts, and quicken you into life everlasting. To some of you our work may seem only like digging for digging's sake; and you are content to dig only because we are kind to you, and you like to be with us and with one another. You see no cloud in the sky; you hear no sound of wind; you do not see where any water is to come from: nevertheless the water does come, as some of you can testify. For in the holy words spoken by Christ and his Apostles, besides and beneath the letter which you can all learn, there is the spirit which giveth life; and by learning the letter you prepare the way for the coming of the spirit. Think: if any wholly untaught man, who had never heard anything about our Father or our Redeemer, were to read a few verses from the New Testament, or to hear a sermon, he could make nothing of it; sermon and verses would say nothing to him: he would not so much as know what the words meant. But *to you*, simply because you have been taught in some measure what the words of the Bible mean, a few verses, or a sermon on them, may some day say so much that you will be constrained to give

your heart to God. You are, therefore, cutting trenches every Sunday; and, when *that* day comes, these trenches will be filled with the water from heaven, of which if any man drink he shall never thirst more.

It is wonderful how graciously, and how silently, God works in prepared hearts. Why, this very year the water of life has run into the hearts of some twenty of your school-fellows; and yet most of you saw no rain, and heard no wind, and do not at all know how or when it was that words long familiar to them grew full of life and power—so full of power that their whole lives have been changed and raised and bettered. And you may see no water in your own trenches yet; but it may be coming; it *is* coming if you are making ready for it. The old words about God's great love for you, and the familiar stories about the grace of Him who died to save us, will yet come to you with such force that you will be constrained to love the God who loves you, and to give yourselves to the service of the Saviour who gave Himself for you.

But before you can hope to feel this water of life springing up within you unto life eternal, *you* must dig as well as your teachers; you must not leave all the work to them. That is to say, when we pray with and for you, you must pray with us, and for yourselves. When we try to shew you what the Scriptures mean, you must try to see what they mean. When we speak to you of the love of God

as shewn in Jesus Christ, you must try to see and to feel what that love is like; you must urge and persuade yourselves to respond to it.

Do but so much as this; get the Word of God into your memories and hearts, cherish it and pray over it, and one day it will lay hold upon you with a power that shall bring you face to face with God, and make you love and serve Him thenceforth and for ever. For "the rain it raineth every day," so that sooner or later every trench may be filled. And the renewing influences of the Divine Spirit, like the rain, are for ever falling, that every heart, so soon as it is prepared for them, may receive them, and drink in life with joy from these wells of salvation. Of this living water may you all drink, and that right early.

V.

ARE YOU AWAKE?

"The child is not awaked."—2 KINGS iv. 31.

HAT is a very pretty story which we read from this chapter a few minutes ago. And now I am going to tell it to you in my own words, and so tell it, if I can, as to explain it to you.

Elisha, who lived and died nearly thirty centuries ago, was the Head, or Rector, or Warden, of all the colleges which the Bible calls "the schools of the sons of the prophets." There were a good many of these schools scattered over the kingdom of Israel; and I suppose that, when Elisha visited them all, he must have travelled a circuit of at least a hundred miles; which would take him longer then, of course, than to go a thousand miles would now. You must not think of these "schools," however, as mere schools for boys, though I dare say some boys were

taught in them. They were attended by men; and the men who attended them were not always, though they were for the most part, young men. Nor must you think of them as schools or colleges in which only men *who afterwards became prophets* were trained for that sacred function and work. They were attended by hundreds of men who never knew more of God's will than their neighbours. Only a few were selected from them, in every age, to see visions, and dream dreams, and proclaim the will of the Lord. But they were all called "sons," or disciples "of the prophets," because they were all taught by prophets; and because, if they sometimes called the prophet who taught them "Master," they commonly called him "Father." He was their "father," and they were his "sons"; or, as we should say, he was their "master," and they were his "scholars" or disciples.

Now I dare say you would like to know what they learned in these schools or colleges; and what became of the young men, as most of them did not grow into prophets, when they left college. Well, they learned to read and to write; for, as you know, reading and writing do *not* come by nature, but have to be acquired with much pains. And in the time of Elisha many great and noble men, and many men of the highest rank, could not read a single word, nor even so much as sign their names. The sons, or scholars, of the prophets learned also to make and to recite the ballads and songs in which the splendid

and heroic deeds of their fathers were set to music, so that all memory of what God had done for men, by men, should not die out of their minds. And they learned music, that they might sing these ballads, and accompany their songs with the pleasant notes of the psaltery and the harp.

I doubt whether at this time there were any other schools in Israel; so that, probably, these sons or disciples of the prophets were the only educated men of their age; and, certainly, they were by far the best educated men. When they left college, therefore, such of them as did not become prophets or seers, would take all the public offices which only educated men could fill. Many of them, no doubt, went back to their farming and vine-dressing, or to such other vocations as they had left; but many of them became scribes, or writers, who kept the public records and accounts, or chroniclers who wrote the history of their time, or poets who composed ballads and psalms, or even wandering minstrels who roamed through the land, and sat down by the fountains, or in the gates of the cities, and sang the old ballads, or recited the old stories, which the people loved to hear.

All these colleges were in Elisha's charge; and he seems to have spent the greater part of his long life in travelling from school to school, in order that all who were being taught in them might have the benefit of his instruction; and that he might see whether the masters who were under him were

doing their duty diligently and in a godly spirit. *And that was how he came to Shunem.*

On one of his long journeys—and they must have been both long and wearisome, for he went afoot—he came to this little village, or township, which lies on the lower slope of a mountain called "the little Hermon," and was hospitably entertained by a rich lady who did not trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God. This good woman soon discovered that Elisha was a good man; not simply a prophet, for even so early as this there were bad prophets as well as good, but a holy prophet, or, as she calls him, "a holy man of God." And so she begged her husband, who seems to have derived much of his wealth from her, to build a chamber on the flat roof of their house—a balconied chamber, I think, projecting over the wall—where the Prophet might be quiet, because removed from the stir and bustle of a large rural homestead—and to set it apart for his use. The hospitable and wealthy farmer—some such man as Boaz was perhaps—did as he was asked; and ever afterwards, so often as Elisha came that way on his rounds, he turned into his chamber and rested there.

But who is it that goes with Elisha on all his journeys? It is Gehazi, his servant. And now I must say a word or two about *him*, that you may understand the part he plays in our story: for most of you, I suppose, like a good many older people, do not at all know who and what manner of man he

was. Gehazi was the "servant," or minister, of Elisha in precisely the same sense in which Elisha himself had been the servant, or minister, of Elijah. He must, therefore, have been a man of much promise and of rare gifts. Probably he had distinguished himself both as a scholar, and as a teacher, in the prophetic schools. No doubt he expected to be, no doubt Elisha intended him to be, his successor, the chief prophet of the next generation, and the "father," or warden, of all the colleges. And, therefore, we may be sure that he was a man richly endowed, a devout man, a man very open and sensitive to spiritual influences and aims; a man with much that was noble and attractive in his character, and fitted in many ways to become the minister and representative of God to men. But—O the pity of it!—this young man, so lovable, so gifted, so pious, so capable of the highest achievements, cherished one base passion which was like the little rift within the lute that lets all its music out. He cherished that "love of money" against which St. Paul warned his son Timothy as "a root of all the evils" which mar the character of man and unfit him for the Divine service. Reaching out, searching after, this evil root, he wandered from the faith, and pierced himself through with many sorrows. By this secret worldliness, half disguised even from himself as yet, he was turned aside from following after truth and righteousness with an undivided heart; and, instead of rising to be the chief

human friend and minister of God, sank, at least for a time, into a leper and an outcast, and forfeited for ever the high post which had been put within his reach. Whether or not the good Shunamite had penetrated his disguise, whether he had betrayed his base passion by a craving for gifts and presents, while he was staying in her opulent and hospitable house, we cannot tell. But it is very evident that, for some reason, she had little faith in him, little hope that *he* could be of any use or comfort to her in her great affliction.

Remember, then, you are not to think of Gehazi as the "servant" of Elisha in our sense of the word "servant"; he was Elisha's chosen friend, minister, and successor. Nor are you to think of him as a wholly bad man; there was much that was good in him, much which promised to grow into the highest style of goodness: but, like many other good men, he let *this* world be too much with him; while he longed to be a prophet, he hated the poverty and meanness of a prophet's lot.

Now it happened on a day when Elisha and Gehazi were staying in the rich Farmer's house at Shunem, that Elisha, who was so little of Gehazi's mind as to feel that it was even more blessed to give than to receive, bade his minister call the goodman's kind wife into the chamber that he might learn what he could do for her, how he could requite her for her hospitality. Thinking, I suppose, that she might speak more freely to Gehazi than she would to him,

he bids Gehazi fall into talk with her, and find out whether she wanted anything that he could get for her by speaking to the king or to the commander-in-chief. Her husband *might* like a commission in the army, you know; or she might have had a wrong done her by a neighbour which a word from the king would remedy; or they might both of them, as they were persons of wealth and consideration, like to live at Court and be part of its state. But, no: this good kind woman has both godliness and contentment; and "godliness with contentment" is a far greater gain than any which kings can bestow, and which they are far more likely to take away than to confer. She lacks nothing, she says; she wants nothing. She dwells quietly and happily among her own "people," *i.e.* her family, and servants, and tenants, all of whom know her and love her; and she has no wish for change.

It shews how truly godly, and how truly content, she was, that she would ask nothing of the Prophet, although what every Hebrew wife accounted the greatest of boons had been denied her. She had no child: and we know how great a sorrow and reproach most Hebrew women reckoned that to be. But *she* makes no complaint of it, no burden. God has been so good to her, and she has so much to be thankful for, and she is of so sweet and gentle a disposition, that she is quite content, quite able to say, "God's will be done." Gehazi has noticed, however, that there is no child running about the house and fields.

And so, when Elisha asks him, "What, then, can be done for her?" he replies, "Verily, she has no son; and her husband is old." And, now, a great and wonderful thing happens to her. Elisha promises her that within a year she shall have this proof also of the favour of God; and within the year a son is given her, and brings with him a new and deeper joy to the whole household.

Three years pass away, and the baby grows up into a sturdy little fellow whose feet are everywhere. He runs about the house, climbs into his mother's lap, and follows his proud old father through the vineyards and the fields. And, of course, when anything special is going on, when the hay is mown, or the wheat cut, or the grapes are gathered and crushed in the wine-press, *he* must be there, to see and to help. But one year, when the harvest is being got in, and the swarthy sunburned reapers are swinging their sickles through the corn, and the women are binding the golden ears into sheaves, the poor little man runs about too long in the blazing sunshine, has a sun-stroke, turns pale and sick and dizzy, and is carried home to his mother, only to die upon her knees.

To lose this bright boy, who had grown into her very heart, must have been a terrible blow to her, all the more terrible because it was so sudden and unexpected. And under the blow she waxes well-nigh desperate. Before he was born, she had been content to have no child, since that seemed to be

the will of God. But now, now that she has had him, and has loved and cherished him, though it is God who takes him away, she cannot consent to part with him: the will of God seems so cruel as to be intolerable. And hence, when she has laid the poor lifeless body in the hushed and quiet chamber of the Prophet, she calls for an ass, mounts it, bids one of "the young men" (*i.e.* the servants) run beside her and keep the ass at its quickest pace, resolved that she will not lose a moment, but will at once appeal to "the man of God" and constrain him to come to her help. She knew that he was at the college at Carmel; probably, he had stayed with her only a few days before on his way to the college. And she determines to follow him, and to bring him back with her. The harvest sun is blazing in the sky: it is midday, for her boy died at noon. Carmel is seventeen miles off, and the road runs through a steep mountainous district. At her best speed, it will take her some hours to reach the Prophet. But nothing daunts her; and she sets out on her long weary ride.

At last Carmel comes in view, with the blue Mediterranean sea sparkling beyond it. Elisha and Gehazi are strolling together on the mountain slope in the cool evening air. The Prophet says to his minister, "Look, that is the Shunamite!" At his Master's order, Gehazi runs down to meet her, and asks, "Is it well with thee? and with thy husband? and with thy child?" But she has no mind to open her heart to *him*. Perhaps she knew him too well

to trust him. Perhaps she only feared to be delayed by the long tedious talk in which Orientals commonly indulge when they meet by the way. And so she only tosses him the curt salutation "Peace," which it would be an insult to withhold, and rides on till she reaches the man of God. When she reaches him, she flings herself on the ground, clings to his feet, and cries, in the indirect Eastern way: "Did I *ask* a son of thee? Did I not say, do not kindle false hopes in me?" And Elisha understands that she has lost the son who had been given her in answer to his prayers. He is profoundly moved by her grief, and instantly bestirs himself to help her. He bids Gehazi gird himself for a journey. He gives him the pastoral rod, or staff, which, from the time of Moses, had been the symbol of the prophetic authority and power. He warns him not to salute any man by the way; for in the East, as I have reminded you, salutations are very ceremonious and consume much time. And he charges him, as soon as he arrives at Shunem, to go straight to the chamber, and lay the prophetic staff on the face of the child. But even with this the bereaved mother is not satisfied. She distrusts Gehazi, I think; but, in any case, nothing will content her but that the Prophet himself should go back with her. So Gehazi runs on ahead, with the staff in his hand; and Elisha and the Shunamite follow, the one riding and the other walking through the cool and darkened hours of the night.

I suppose it must have been past midnight before they reached Shunem. But, before they quite reach it, Gehazi runs back to them, and reports, with no little chagrin and disappointment, that "the child is not awaked." He had laid the staff on the boy's face, but the boy did not rise, did not even move or speak, or make any response. So that Elisha himself has to enter the chamber, and, by long-continued earnest wrestling of spirit with God, win the boy back to life.

Now I think Elisha had expected that the prophetic staff would have sufficed to quicken life; or why should he have been so urgent with Gehazi to lose no time by the way? And I think Gehazi quite expected to see the child sit up and to hear him speak; or why should he be so disappointed at having failed to elicit any response? And I suppose the reason of the failure was that Gehazi was not a fit agent for the wonder-working power; that God, who reads the heart, saw in him the selfishness, the covetousness, which soon came to light, and therefore refused to acknowledge him. To *give* life a man must *have* life, and have it in its purity and abundance. And the spiritual life of Gehazi was impaired by the sordid lust which made a leper of him at the last. Only the fervent prayer of *the righteous* man is effectual with God.

By this time, my dear children, I hope you understand this pretty story better than you did: and

some of you, I dare say, begin to see why I have selected from it as my text the words, "The child is not awaked." For many of you are, or have been, quite as "dead," in the truest sense of that word, as was the boy who lay still and white in the Prophet's chamber at Shunem, and need to be "awaked" quite as much as he did. I am not now speaking to the very little ones among you. No doubt even in the youngest of you there are evil germs which may unfold themselves by and bye, until you too die, or fall asleep, to God and goodness. No doubt even *you* often do wrong, and know that it is wrong while you do it. But, for all that, I do not call you "dead" if God is near and present to you, if you think of Him as your Father, if you are sorry when you do wrong, if you are quickly and easily moved to love, admire, and imitate whatsoever is right and brave and noble. It is a mere libel, or a mere mistake, to call those *dead* whose hearts are still so sensitive to every spiritual and kindly touch, to whom the heavenly world is still so close and true and attractive that their angels stand nearest the Throne, and of whom the Saviour Himself has said, "*Of such* is the kingdom of heaven." No: even the narrow and austere Jewish rabbis did not call a boy "a son of the law," and hold him to be fully responsible for himself, until his thirteenth birthday: and even that was one, if not two, years earlier than the Jewish law required: and I am not going to be more harsh and stern with you than they were.

But there are some of you, many of you, who have lived long enough, and have long enough been "knocked about" in the little world of School, to have grown somewhat dull and "dead." God is not so real, or He is not so much, to you as He was. You are not so ashamed of doing wrong as you were; it may be even that there are some things which you know your masters or parents would think wrong that you take a foolish pride in hiding from them. Perhaps you are even drawn to do things simply *because* you are forbidden to do them. Perhaps you are not really sorry, but hard and defiant, when you are found out, though you still go through the forms of penitence. Perhaps you eagerly do things when you are not seen, which you would not dare to do if you knew that any eye was upon you. Perhaps you are getting greedy, selfish, hard to please; or, like Gehazi, covetous of the good things which others have, but you have not.

I have known girls who wore a very serious, and even pious, face when they were with their elders, and yet ran on very giddily, and exposed themselves to dangers of which they were little aware, when they were out of school or away from home. And I have known lads who could talk very properly and dutifully when they were at home, and yet laugh even at their own smooth faces and goody talk when they left it. Yes: I have often seen a most gruesome sight. I have seen *a dead boy inside a living boy*, and *a dead girl inside a living girl!* That is to say,

I have seen girls and boys who had lost their sensibility to spiritual things, their love of goodness, truth, kindness, and gentleness, and were nevertheless quite content with themselves so long as they could get nice food to eat, nice clothes to wear, and plenty of pocket-money and amusement. Is it too much to say that such boys and girls are *dead?* Why, you might call any dog worth keeping "dead" if he cared only for his bone and his kennel and a run every day, if he were not sensible of any kindness you shewed him, if he were not faithful, courageous, attached? At all events, you would not scruple to call him "a nasty *insensible* brute," although, if you struck him, he would soon prove that he was not devoid of sensation. How much more, then, may we say that a man is "dead" if he is insensible to all that is best and highest in human life? How much more may we say that boys and girls are "dead,"—dead in spirit, dead in the worst kind of death—if they have lost all care for God, for truth and righteousness and kindness?

And, then, some of you, if you are not dead, are at least "fast asleep." Your spiritual faculties and affections rust unused, or they are seldom used. You are dreaming, and pursuing dreams. For what we often call "the real world," the world outside us, is not truly the real one; but the world within it, and behind it, and beyond it. Thousands of men pass into this outward world, and pass out of it, every day; and they can only take with them

what they have stored up within themselves. So that it is this inner world which is the real world to us, the world in which alone true and enduring treasures are to be found. And if any of you think the outside world—in which you only stay for a few years at most—to be the real one, and are living only or mainly for that, while the inward and spiritual world, in which you are to abide for ever, is unreal and unattractive to you;—what can we say of you except that you are fast asleep, and do not see things as they are, and mistake dreams for realities and realities for dreams? You have eyes, but they are not open. There are faculties in you capable of apprehending the true realities, but as yet they are not in exercise. Like the Shunamite's son, who was both asleep and dead, you need to be awaked; you need to be quickened unto life.

Most of you can remember a time when, early in the morning, your mother came into your room, and said gently and kindly, "My dear, are you awake?" And at first perhaps, because she spoke so gently and seemed so unwilling to disturb you, you thought if you kept your eyes shut, and did not answer, she would let you lie on and go to sleep again. But you soon found that she meant to have you up; that she could speak louder if you made her, and even shake you by the shoulder till you were obliged to open your eyes, and answer her, and leave your warm bed. And I should like to ask that very question of you, though in another sense, and to ask it with her

gentle persistency and determination. I should like to creep into your very hearts, and whisper, "Are you awake?" and to go on asking it till you were roused from your dreams, and saw things as they really are; for it is my duty to you, as it is that of your other teachers, to rouse and wake you, if we anyhow can.

But, at the very outset, you may turn upon me, and say: "How are we to know whether we are what you call awake? What *is* it to be awake, and alive, toward God? What do you *want* us to be and to do?"

And I reply: Well, for one thing, I do not want to see you trying to become sanctimonious little saints. I should hate to see you behaving and to hear you talking as some of the "good children" behave and talk of whom you read in certain tracts and books; like the children, for instance, who speak as if they had reached a feeble old age, and were utterly weary of this fair large world in which God has sent us to live, and longed for nothing so much as to get out of it as fast as they can. What I want is that you should set yourselves to become good, useful, and happy men and women, by placing the best and highest aims before you, by acting on right motives, because you know that God loves you, and is bent on making you good.

How are you to know whether you are alive and awake, or asleep and dead? In a hundred different ways—such ways as these. If you are at school,

and set yourself to learn your lessons well and to get on fast—as I hope you all do—you may have very different motives for doing your duty in school. You may care only to beat your class-fellows, to stand above them, to get on in your little world and be looked up to: and if that be your aim or motive, it is a selfish one, and you are asleep and dead to the true motives and aims by which you ought to be inspired. But if you are eager to learn because you wish to do your duty, and to fit yourselves for larger duties by and bye, because you want to become wiser, better, more useful, or because you want to please your parents and shew that you are not unmindful of how much they have done for you, or because you want to please God and to prove that you thankfully remember how much *He* has done for you and given you, then you are alive and awake: for, now, your motives reach up out of and beyond this present world, which will soon pass away, and you are trying to prepare yourselves for any life, or any world, to which it may please God to call you.

So, again, in the home you may be fairly good and obedient children from two very different sets of motives. You may obey your parents mainly because you know they can give you what you like to have or take it away; or you may honour and obey them because "this is right," because you love them, and because you know that God, who loves you, wants you to obey and please them. And if you obey them because you love Him and them, and therefore

obey when they are absent as well as when they are present, why then you are alive, you are awake, you are training yourselves for a life of duty and blessedness which will never pass away.

And, lastly, some of you are growing up into men and women, and have to go out into the world to earn your daily bread. Are you diligent, thoughtful, eager to advance? Why, so far, well. But you may be diligent, observant, quick to seize every advantage and opportunity, mainly because you hate work and hope to get free from it the more quickly; or because you want to lay by money, to get rich, to make a fortune; or because you are bent on distinction, reputation, applause. And, in that case, you are dead and asleep; you are not alive and awake to the best things, the most satisfying, the most enduring. For this life, for which alone you are living, will soon be over, and the riches which have wings soon use them and fly away. On the other hand, you may be diligent, thoughtful, quick to seize occasion as it rises, because it is your duty, because you want to train and accomplish yourselves, because you long to be of some use in the world, and in every world that may come after it, because you love God and hold his law to be the true law of life, his peace its true end. And, in that case, you are alive and awake. If you should die to-night, our Father would not have sorrowfully to say of you, "The child is not awake," and feel that He must put you into hard and painful conditions

which will rouse and sting you to a sense of all that you have lost and thrown away. And if you should live to be never so old, still all your life will be a useful and happy preparation for the better life to come.

And, now that you know how to answer this question, let me once more press the question upon you: "Are you *awake?*" Let me beg you to ask it of yourselves, until you can reply, "Yes, thank God, we *are* awake; we are really alive: and, therefore, we shall never die."

VI.

THE CHILDREN'S CHARTER.

"And they brought little children unto him, that he should touch them; and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me; forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily, I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall in no wise enter therein. And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them."
—MARK x. 13–16.

THERE is no passage in the whole Bible, my dear children, which should be more dear and precious to you than this. For this is the children's *charter*. In these golden words the Lord Jesus claims you for Himself, for his own, and confers upon you the franchise of his kingdom. He tells you, He tells the church and the world, that He came to save and bless you, that He *has* saved you and *will* bless you. He assures you that so long at

least as you are children, so long as you are what children ought to be, you are in the kingdom of God, and need have no care, no fear. We should all feel, I think, that, were this passage struck out of it, the gospel of Christ would be quite another gospel; that there would be something wanting in it. But you, *you* ought to value it above all other words. A charter which gives you a clear title, not only to "a mansion in the skies," but to much more than that, should be inexpressibly dear to you. You should not only "get it by heart"; you should think of it, and brood over it, till you are quite sure that you know what it means, till you fully understand what rights and privileges it confers upon you.

Come, then, and let us consider it together, and see what we can make of it. You will, at least you ought to, have many questions to ask about it; and these questions I will help you to answer as well as I can.

If you are really trying to understand what these words mean, as I hope you are, one of the first questions you will ask will be, Where and when were they uttered? for the time and place of words often throws some light upon their meaning. They were spoken in Perea, as our Lord was on his way, for the last time, from Galilee to Jerusalem. He had closed his ministry in the province of Galilee, in which He had been brought up. He had looked for the last time on the hills He had so often climbed, the lake on which He had so often sailed,

the synagogues and streets in which He had so often taught. He would see the friendly peasants and fishermen who had listened to Him gladly no more—at least with eyes of flesh. And He was going to Jerusalem, where the priests hated Him, and had set themselves to compass his death. At first He seems to have intended to take the straight road to Jerusalem, and to pass through Samaria. But when He found that the Samaritans of the border villages would not receive Him, ~~He changed his mind.~~ He crossed the fords of the Jordan, and travelled through Perea, on the farther, or Eastern, side of the river.

Now in Perea He found some of the very best people of that time; and some of the worst. For many of the Jews of this district were half heathenized by constant contact with the heathen who, in large numbers, were settled among them. And, naturally, those who remained true to the God and to the faith of Israel were all the more faithful and zealous because of the difficulties they had to encounter and the opposition they had to overcome. And there were many difficulties in their way: among others this. In Jerusalem was the place where they ought to worship; and the roads to Jerusalem were often closed against them. Sometimes, when the snows on the mountains melted, or great rains fell on the hills, the waters, the swellings, of Jordan rose so high, and ran so fast, that the fords became impassable; and they could not go up to the Temple

to make atonement for their sins and seek the face of God. Sometimes there was war in the land; and whenever war broke out, among the first places to be seized were the roads, the passes on the hills, and the fords of the River. How keenly they felt being thus shut out from the worship of God we learn from the Psalms; for most of the psalms which are full of longing for the courts of the Lord's house, for the altars on which even the swallows might build their nests, and for the city that was compact together, were written by poets who lived, across the Jordan, in Perea: and no doubt these psalms expressed the yearning of many hearts besides their own.

It was in this district, then, where there were many good men and women who were devoted to the service of the Temple, and all the more devoted because they were often shut out from it, and because their neighbours were heathen or heathenized Jews, to whom the temple and the God of the temple were not dear: it was *here* that they brought children to Jesus, in order that He might touch them.

Who was it that brought the children to Jesus? Why, of course, it was their mothers: for, in describing this scene, St. Luke uses a word which means not only children, and little children, but *babes at the breast*, "nurslings": and who should bring *these* to Christ but the mothers who nursed them?

Now none of you will be at all surprised that good kind women should be drawn to Jesus Christ, or that the little children who lay in their arms, or ran by their side, should "take" to Him. He was so wise, so pure, so tender and thoughtful, that you do not wonder that the mothers who saw Him wanted Him to say a prayer, to utter a benediction, over their children, or that the little ones liked to nestle in his arms, and lifted up their faces that He might kiss them. That was very natural, you think; and I think so too. For when I was a boy, I was taken into my father's library, to be "blessed" by those two great missionaries, John Williams and William Knibb; and to this moment I remember how proud and happy it made me to have their hands laid on my head and to hear the kind words they said. It made me feel very "good," at least for a little while; and I think that somehow, though I don't at all know how that should be, I am the better for it to this day.

At any time, then, good women would like their children to be "noticed" and blessed by a Teacher so wise and pure and kind, by so great and devoted a Missionary, as Jesus Christ. But was there nothing special to draw them to Him at this time? I think there must have been, or they would not have ventured to intrude upon Him while He was holding a public discussion with the grave and austere Pharisees, a discussion so important that his disciples could not bear to have it interrupted for a

moment. What made them so bold, then? I think it was the discussion itself. For, if you look back in the Chapter, you will see that what the Pharisees had been discussing with Christ was Marriage and Divorce; and in this discussion *the Lord Jesus had taken the woman's side*, while the Pharisees had taken the man's side.

Let me explain for a moment. In the Colleges of Jerusalem there were at this time two great schools —the school of Hillel and the school of Shammai. Rabbi Hillel held and taught that, if he gave her "a writing of divorcement," a man might put away his wife for almost any reason, however unreasonable it might be—even because she had not cooked his dinner to his mind, or because he had "fallen in love" with some younger and prettier face. Rabbi Shammai held and taught that marriage was for life; that it was wrong for a man to put away his wife so long as she was true to him. It was this dispute of the Schools which the Pharisees of Perea had just submitted to the judgment of Christ. And He had taken Rabbi Shammai's side. He had shewn it to be the plain teaching of the law and word of God, that those whom God had joined together were not to be put asunder by man.

Now think how pleased and glad the women, the mothers, who stood by would be to hear *that*. Among them, no doubt, there were some good wives who no longer had a husband; and they carried in their arms or held by the hand children who no

longer had a father, although the men they once called "father" and "husband" were still alive. Possibly, some of these men were *there*, and had taken part in the debate. Who can wonder that the women felt they had a friend in Christ? Who can wonder that they broke in upon a debate in which they were so profoundly interested, and begged this good Rabbi, who took their part, to lay his hands upon their children and to bless them?

For this was what they really asked Him to do. My text says only that they wanted Him to "touch" them. But St. Matthew tells us that they brought their children to Him "*that He might lay his hands upon them and pray*." The prayer of a Man so righteous must, they thought, avail much. If He would only say, "God bless you, my children," they thought their little ones would be the better for it. It was out of a full heart, a heart which He had stirred to deep emotion, that they made their request. And it was with a heart no less full, with an emotion far deeper, that He responded to it. For, we read, "*He took the children up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them*." And beautiful as these words are, they do not convey half the beauty, or half the tenderness, of the words which St. Mark wrote. And, indeed, I do not know how best to bring out that beauty and tenderness. But certainly the verb which we translate "He *took them up* in his arms" means that "He *clasped* them in his arms," that He fondly and tenderly embraced

them. And the other word which we render "He *blessed* them," is also a very loving and affectionate word. It is not the common word for blessing; but a special and peculiar word reserved for blessing relatives and friends at meeting and parting. It is used in *The Apochrypha* of the pious and generous Raguel. When he sent away his daughter and her husband to their distant home in Nineveh, "he blessed them *affectionately*, and sent them away, saying, The God of heaven give you a prosperous journey, my children." And, again, it is used of the good old Tobit. "When he came near to his daughter-in-law, he blessed her *affectionately*, saying, Thou art welcome, my daughter." So that what St. Mark really says is not simply that Jesus blessed the children, but that He blessed them fondly, tenderly, affectionately, as though they were his little kinsmen and friends, and He was very glad to see them.

Ah, what a Man He was! what a Saviour He is! how good, how kind, how loving and lovable! Just think of it: if you had been there, He would have clasped you in his arms, or have laid his hand on your head, and poured out his heart over you in prayer and love and benediction. And you would have remembered to the day of your death, as no doubt those happy children of Perea did, the kind benignant eyes that looked down into yours, and the tender hands that fondled you, and the words of love and prayer that He breathed over you. Would God

you *had* been there! And yet how foolish of me to wish that, or for you to wish it, when both you and I know quite well that Christ is just as truly here at this moment as He was of old in Perea, and is just as willing to lavish his love on you as on the children who were then brought to Him!

See, my children: I, and your other friends here, bring you before Jesus, and ask Him to touch and bless you: and even while we speak, He responds. He *is* blessing you at this very instant; and it only remains that you open your hearts to receive his benediction. He is seeking to touch you, to win you to love Him by persuading you of his love for you: and what greater blessing can He confer upon you than that? If you will only give Him a place in your hearts, that will be far better for you than had you been taken up into his arms.

It throws the tender loving-kindness of Jesus into bold relief if we compare it with the unloving and inconsiderate behaviour of his disciples. For they "rebuked" the women, and even laid their strong hands on the little ones who came running round Christ, *and pushed them back*. They seem, indeed, to have been quite unusually rude and rough in their bearing. For when we read they "rebuked" the women, we are not to understand that they used dignified and polite language. What the word means is that they *chid*, that they *scolded* them, rating them for their forwardness and presumption

in intruding themselves upon the Master's notice. And whereas we read that Jesus said to the angry disciples, "*Suffer* the little children to come unto me, and *forbid* them not," what we ought to read is, "*Let* the little children go—*let go them*—take your hands off them, and do not *hold them back*, do not *push them away*." So that from our Lord's own words we learn that the Apostles were pushing the women and children back and standing in their way, in order to prevent them from coming to Jesus.

Now you do not want to think badly of such men as Peter and John, Thomas and Philip. And there is no reason why you should think they behaved very badly. They only made a mistake such as we all make sometimes. It was love, rising to zeal, for their Lord which led them to push back the children, though it was not a zeal according to knowledge. They thought He would not like being interrupted in the midst of a grave public discussion. And, besides, they were themselves very much interested in the discussion that was going on, and had begun to take part in it. They did not wish it to be broken off. They thought the women and children could very well wait. They were vexed and annoyed with them for coming forward at such an inopportune moment. And so they pushed them back, and I dare say called out, "Keep back there! He can't attend to you now. Don't you see that He is busy?"

They meant no harm; and yet they might have

done great harm. They might not only have robbed you of your Charter, and the women and their children of the blessing they craved: they might also have deprived themselves and the Pharisees of the lesson they both so much needed to learn: *viz.*, "Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein." But though they meant no harm, Christ was very angry with them for the harm they were doing without meaning it. He was "*much displeased*"; "He had *indignation*" against them. He rebuked them for their rebuke. "*Let go* the children," He commanded; "and do not hold them back from Me." You can hear his indignation in his words. And then, as St. Luke tells us, He Himself "*called*" the children to Him. You can fancy Him turning away from the rude disciples, and stooping down towards the frightened children, and coaxing them to come to Him.

Even the best men, then, even those who stand nearest Christ, sin against Him and provoke Him to anger if they treat children as though they did not belong to Him, and had no right to come to Him. And yet this is just what many good men are doing unto this day. Like the Apostles, they mean no harm, and yet they are doing the great harm of trying to rob you of your Charter. Speaking of *these* children, some of whom were still babes, Christ says: "*Of such* is the kingdom of God," meaning, of course, that little children, and all who resemble

them, are in that kingdom. But many good men say: "No, He cannot possibly have meant that. The kingdom of heaven cannot belong to little children. It only belongs to men and women who are *like* little children, who have the spirit of a little child. For children have much which is evil in them, as well as much which is good and lovable: how, then, can *they* be in the kingdom of God?"

Now did you ever hear such nonsense, such cruel nonsense, as that? When our Lord hears good men speaking so, surely He must once more be "much displeased," burn with "indignation" once more, and say: "Let the children alone, and do not keep them back from me!" For if children are not in the kingdom of God, why or how should we enter it by becoming like them? Why should we try to be like them if they are not acceptable to God and to Christ? Why should likeness to them admit *us* to a kingdom from which they themselves are shut out?

Remember what Christ's words are: "*Of such* is the kingdom of God." What *can* the words mean if not that children and all who resemble them, all who possess the essential qualities of childhood, are members of that kingdom? If I were to point to these roses, and say, "Of such as these is the floral kingdom composed;" what would you think of the good sense of a man, however wise he looked, if he should go away and affirm that what I meant was, that all flowers *like roses* were in the floral kingdom,

but that *roses themselves* were not? Or if I were speaking of angels, and said: "Of such is the kingdom of heaven;" what sort of commentator would he be who should argue from my words that no angel was in that kingdom, that they were all out side it? And when our Lord, speaking of children, says: "*Of such* is the kingdom of God;" what can we think of those who argue from his words that children themselves are *not* in God's kingdom? I will tell you what I think of them: I think they hold some dogma, or creed, not in harmony with the mind of Christ, and try therefore to wrest these gracious words from their plain meaning.

But never mind *them*. Look to Christ; listen to what *He* says. He says that you children, and those who resemble you, are in his kingdom; and that, therefore, you may go to Him when you will, sure that He loves you, and that He will bless you.

Does it follow that you are very good, only good, and that continually? Not at all. You may have many naughty tempers, many bad tricks and ways. But so also have the good people who assume that they are in the kingdom of Christ, and that you are not. If only those who have nothing evil in them are members of that kingdom, then Christ is King of none but Himself. There is much evil, much imperfection, in us all, even in the youngest of us. But whatever faults there are in little children, there are some good qualities in them for which we all love and admire them. They are innocent of much

of which we are guilty; they are frank, easily pleased, obedient (as a rule), teachable, grateful, quick to feel love and to respond to it. *We* were all children once; and even the best of us feels, sadly enough at times, that he has fallen away from his early innocence and freshness and susceptibility to spiritual influences, and longs to regain the spirit and temper of a little child. And why should we long for *that* if we did not feel that childhood is nearer God than manhood, that heaven lies more closely about us in our infancy than in after years?

Listen, little ones. Partly because you are little, and stand most in need of his help and grace, but partly too because He sees much in you which He loves, the Lord Jesus Christ claims you for his own. He says that you belong to him, that you are in his kingdom, that his angels watch over you, and that the angels who have *you* in their charge stand nearest to the throne of God, *i.e.* they are the strongest and holiest of the heavenly host. He sees that, on the whole, you try to be good and kind; that, when you do wrong, you are soon and easily made sorry for it; that you love those who love you, that, because you trust in their wisdom and bounty, you live without care or fear. And, therefore, He wants you to know that *He* loves you: that He, who once clasped little children in his arms and fondled them and blessed them, holds you in an affection no less tender, and is always seeking to bless you and to do you good. He wants you to know that He

regards you as his little kinsmen and friends; that you may always go to Him, and tell Him how sorry you are when you have been naughty, and ask Him to make you a good child.

But I must not forget that many, and indeed most, of you are no longer little children; that you are fast growing up to be men and women: that some of you *are* young men and women, and have already gone out into the world to earn your bread. It is easy to talk to the little ones, and to take them the good news of the kingdom. But what am I to say to you? If you have not voluntarily entered the kingdom of Christ, if you have not chosen for yourselves that "good part" which can never be taken away from you, you may have listened to me somewhat sadly. You may have felt that The Children's Charter carries little comfort for you, since you are no longer children. You have noticed, perhaps, that in reporting this saying of our Lord both St. Matthew and St. Mark speak of "*little* children," while St. Luke informs us that some of them were still "babes at the breast." And you may have felt that like your elders and teachers, who are listening with you and praying for you, you have fallen from your early innocence and susceptibility to impression, and have been expelled from the Paradise in which, all unconsciously, the little ones walk. You may ask: "How are *we* to get back the spirit of a little child? *how* are we to enter the kingdom of heaven? Does Christ care for *us* as He cares for

the little ones? Is He as ready to save us as to bless them?"

If you ask that question sincerely, you can hardly ask it without seeing the answer to it. For you surely do not suppose that He who loved little children did not also love men and women! He loves us all. Did not He love the mothers who brought their children to Him, and the Apostles who thrust them away from Him, and even the very Pharisees who only talked with Him that they might tempt and entrap Him? Why, then, should He not love you and bless you,—bless you in turning you away from the sins into which you have fallen, and by giving you power to become, by a free act of your wills, the sons and daughters of God? Did not He who said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me," also say, "Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest"?

If, then, you have listened to me somewhat sorrowfully, feeling that you are no longer innocent little children, but young men and women who have to answer for yourselves unto God, be very sure that Christ still suffers you to come to Him; and that, if you come, He will in nowise cast you out, but still reckon you among his kinsfolk and friends.

VII.

THE FUNCTION OF CHILDREN.

"And it came to pass when the spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took a harp, and played with his hand; so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him."—1 SAMUEL xvi. 23.

I WONDER what you think that children came into the world for. Nay, I wonder whether you have ever so much as thought that you must have come into the world for some purpose, to fill some place, to be of some use. Many of you are of very little use as yet, I admit—of very little use even to your parents, and of very little comfort, so far as their comfort depends on your conscious and deliberate intention to promote it. There are very few of you, I am afraid, who say to yourselves when you get up in the morning: "Now what can I do to-day to spare my father and mother, or to serve,

or to please them?" There are but few of you, I dare say, who ask yourselves even on one morning of the year: "Of what use am I in the world? What did God send me here for? What did He intend me to be and to do?" And yet, as you see the very moment you think of it, you cannot be absolutely of no use at all. God must have meant you to do something, and something good. You must have some function to fulfil, even though you do not know what it is.

I think it would be well that you *should* know what it is, that you should at least try to find out what it is. And, therefore, I am going to speak to you about the function of children, or at least about *a* function of children: that is to say, I am going to speak to you of one purpose for which God sent you into the world, of one use, or service, which He intends you to render to the world.

Most of you little ones think, I suppose, that you came into the world to be merry, to romp and play, to please and enjoy yourselves; and that all the world was made for you; and that everybody in it is bound to do what you would like them to do. I suppose you think so because I see a good many children running about in the world as if the whole world belonged to them, who claim everything they want as if they had a right to it, who even cry for it if they cannot get it on easier terms, and who think themselves very much injured and aggrieved if everybody is not ready to attend to them when they

speak, and to give them what they ask for, and to play with them the instant they want to play.

And you—don't *you* know any children who will run up to Mama when she is busy, or when she is talking with her friends, and expect her to attend to them instantly, and to listen to what they have to say? Don't you know any children who stand tugging at her gown, and crying out, "Mama, Mama!" till she does attend to them, or at least until she bids them run away and not disturb her? Disturb her indeed! they think. Why, what is she there for except to wait on them? What can she have to do which is half so important as to listen to them, and to give them what they want?

Yes, I think you must all have known children, and children with faces very like your own, who evidently believed that all the world was made for them; that their chief duty was to please themselves; and that everybody else was bound to help them to do that duty.

But if *you* may live to please and enjoy yourselves, why may not I? why may not your fathers and mothers, your brothers and sisters, and indeed everybody else that you know? *We* have as good a right to live our life, and to take our own way, as *you* have. And if we did, what a pretty world it would be for you! You can hardly conceive of anything more dreadful than a world in which no one would attend to you, no one would love you, or teach you, or play with you, or care what became of you.

You see, then, that you have made a great mistake if you think you came into the world only to please and enjoy yourselves. For if everybody did that—and they have quite as good a right to do it as you have—you would be the most miserable little wretches under the sun. Every one would be too busy, in caring for himself, to care for you: and what *could* be more miserable than an uncared-for child?

Now that you are not uncared for, you know. You know that a great deal of love is lavished upon you, and much patient tender care. You have found out that, not your father and mother and kinsfolk only, but most grown men and women look kindly on you, and are ready to do what they can to please and amuse you. You know that is so: but do you know *why* it is so?

I will tell you one reason. It is not because you are such prodigies of beauty and goodness—so clever, so bright, so amiable, that nobody can look at you without loving and admiring you. Strange as it may sound to you, it is mainly *because you are children* that people love you, and like to have you about them, and take pleasure in your pleasure. For as life goes on our hearts are apt to grow dull, and sad, and selfish. It is hard work to earn a living. It is still harder work to live the kind of life which we approve and desire. We have much to do, and much to bear. And the courage and hopefulness with which we set out in life die down

within us and lose their first lustre. Then God sends us children; and we learn to live for them rather than for ourselves; to hope for them if we can no longer cherish bright hopes of ourselves; to be cheerful that we may promote their cheerfulness; to take thought and pains that we may make their lives brighter and happier than our own have been. Generation after generation, men are saved from selfishness, and worldliness, and melancholy, by the children born to them. And so they love the children God sends them, and live for them, and work for them, and scheme and hope for them, and play and are merry with them, and give God thanks for them.

This, then, is the function of children, the main use they are of, the purpose they serve and are intended to serve: they renew the youth of the world. They bring courage, cheerfulness, hope, love, to hearts that are growing weary and sad, or that might grow weary and sad and selfish but for them.

And I do not know where we could find a better illustration of this function than in the story of which my text forms part. God intends you children, each one of you, to do for your parents and friends what David did for Saul.

King Saul had grown weary of the world. The toils and cares of rule, of war, and, above all, the memory of his own faults and sins, had made him moody and melancholy, and at times drove him almost, if not altogether, mad. In his fierce danger-

ous moods he hardly knew, or cared, what he did. And to this tall, swarthy, stalwart man, this moody, passionate, dangerous king, there comes a lad, short in stature, slender in form, with fair hair, large beautiful eyes, and a ruddy countenance (1 Sam. xvi. 12; xvii. 42); a lad so bright and comely that the sacred historian lingers admiringly on every feature of his person. This bright comely David, or "Darling"—for that is what the word "David" means—comes into the King's tent, with a rustic harp in his hand, a harp which he had made, or at least had learned to play, while he kept his father's sheep; and sings to him the sweetest songs—songs of pastoral life, songs of war and triumph, songs about the care and love of God—till he wakens some responsive chords in the fierce King's breast, and calls him back from the wild lawless heats of passion, to the order, and calm, and peace of pure and innocent thoughts, of a firm and stedfast will. David plays with his hand, and *Saul* is refreshed and well.

Now your parents, and the men and women you know, may not be so moody and fierce as Saul. Nevertheless, they have many cares and anxieties to sadden and perplex them. A spirit from God is ever teaching them the mistakes they have made, and reminding them of the sins into which they have fallen. Hence they may stand, and often do stand, in great need of any brightness that you can bring into their lives. *You* may not be as beautiful and

gifted and brave as David; but, none the less, you may do much to sweeten and relieve the hearts of all who love you, and to give their life a new charm. Indeed, while they are very young, most children, by their innocence and simplicity and sweet winning ways, above all by the love and hope they excite, do add a new charm and give a new brightness to the hearts and lives of their parents. And what you did, unconsciously, while you were babes and infants, I want you—nay, God Himself wants you—to do consciously, and with intention, now that you are able to think and reflect. You did *not* come into the world that you might please yourselves simply. You *did* come into it that you might lend new courage and cheerfulness to your parents, and to those who love you and them. And it is high time that some of you took your harps into your hands, and began to play to us a little, that we may be refreshed and well.

Think, then, what a new meaning and value and beauty you would put into your own lives, if you were to reason thus:—"God means me, while I am still a child, not to live for myself alone, but for the parents and friends whom I have so much cause to love. They have cares and anxieties from which I am free. I must not add to their cares, but help them to bear or to forget them. They are often sad and weary. I must not vex them by being disobedient, selfish, clamorous, unloving; but try rather to relieve them by being as bright and loving and

thoughtful as I can, by studying how to please them rather than to please myself. This is what God meant me to be and do; and, please God, I will try to be what He meant me to be, and to do what He intended me to do."

If you were to say that to yourselves, if you were to set that aim clearly and constantly before you, do you not think that some of you might be better children than you are? and happier as well as better, because you were making your parents happier, and at the same time pleasing your Father who is in heaven? In a thousand ways you would be better and happier, and would make those who love you happier and better. And not only those who know and love you. Why, *I* am both vexed and pleased almost every day by children whom I don't know. I see boys wrangling over every game they play at, and even trying to cheat one another if they get a chance. As I pass along the street or through the fields I hear some miserable little booby crying out, "I'll tell Ma!" or "I don't want to;" or I see some poor mother slap a girl who won't do as she is bid until she is slapped into it. Do such children help to make my life cheerful to me, do you think, or anybody else's? And, on the other hand, I see girls trying to help or please their mothers, or one another, without waiting to be bid; or I see a boy standing out of a game that another may have a turn, or talking to his father so brightly and merrily that everybody turns round to have a look at him:

and when I see such children as these, however dull and sad I may be, I brighten up, and begin to think what a good world it is after all.

Ah, I don't believe you children know half your power, or how much you may do, how much you are doing, to make the world brighter or darker, sadder or happier, to all about you! If you did, I feel sure you would take more pains to discharge your true function, and would play such sweet and merry music that all the world would want to dance to your piping. You would be a band of little Davids or Darlings; and we should be "refreshed" by you every time we met you. You would charm the evil spirit out of us, and bring back the good spirit from God.

If you would only say to yourselves: "It is my part, it is my duty, to make my little corner of the world as bright and cheerful as I can, and I will try to do it," even *this* would be a great gain, as well as a great help, to you, and to us. But, perhaps, you would like to get some more definite teaching than this, like to learn a little more exactly in what way, or ways, you may discharge this high function of yours. And David's story suggests at least three ways in which you may do it, at each of which we will just look before I close.

(1) David did his work very thoroughly, although it was very lowly work for him to do. His father, Jesse, was the chief man, and judge, of the village of Bethlehem. His brothers, most of whom seem to have

been a good deal older than he was, were men of some consideration—great tall fellows, very quick with their hands, likely men to make good soldiers and to win honour. But David, though he was called the Darling, was treated rather scurvily, I think; his very father treating him more like a servant than a son. He was set to keep sheep, an office which in his time and country was usually allotted to slaves, or to servants of the lowest class. To be a shepherd was poor work for the son of a well-to-do and much respected man; poor work for a bright gifted lad who was worth far more than all his brothers put together. But, poor as it was, David did it well. As he must be a shepherd, he resolved to be a good shepherd. He *was* a good shepherd, and was ready to lay down his very life for the sheep. He had often to use his sling and stone against birds and beasts of prey. And once, as we know, while still a mere lad, he fought a lion and a bear who came down from the hills, or up from the thickets of the Jordan, to harry his flock. And all work is good work, so that it be well done. It matters very little *what* we do, if it be our duty to do it; but it matters very much *how* we do it.

Most of you have some work to do; girls in helping their mothers about the house—at least I hope your mothers are wise enough to teach you house work: boys, some of you at least, in earning your own livelihood, and others in school tasks and home tasks. And, no doubt, some of you think the work

you have to do beneath you, not good enough or important enough for such clever and promising young people as you are. Perhaps you do it unwillingly, and grumble over it, and think you were cut out for better things. And, perhaps, you were. But if you take your work in that spirit, *you* are not doing much to make life bright and the world more cheerful, whether for others or for yourselves. Whereas, if you do your work heartily and cheerfully, you will not only add to the happiness of those who love you; you will also fit yourselves for better work, *and put yourselves in the way of getting it.* I have known many a lad rise into the best work he was fit for by doing lower kinds of work diligently and cheerfully; but I never knew even one who rose by neglecting his work, or despising it, or grumbling over it.

Do your work well, then, whatever it may be, as well as you can; and you yourself will be the happier for it, and will help to make the world about you happier and sweeter. Even the Lord Jesus was a carpenter, and spent some years in making ploughs and carts, and the commonest kinds of tables and chairs. That does not seem very fit or dignified work for *Him* to have had to do. And yet, are you not quite sure that He did it well, that there were no better made chairs and tables, or carts and ploughs than his in all Galilee?

(2.) While doing his work well, David sought to cultivate and improve himself. It was while he was

a shepherd that he grew so skilful in playing on the harp as to be able to minister to the diseased mind of Saul. It was while a shepherd that he trained himself to discover a beauty in the stars, in the woods, in the fields, in trees and flowers, which afterwards entered so largely into his psalms that men love to read them to this day. And there are few *vocations* which have not their appropriate *avocations :* that is to say, there is hardly any kind of work you have to do as a duty which does not train, or does not afford you leisure to train, some faculty or gift by which you may hereafter minister to the welfare, or the pleasure, of your neighbours.

You often wonder, I dare say, why, besides learning what will be directly useful to you at school, or when you are grown up, you are also set to learn the rudiments of certain sciences or arts, such as botany, chemistry, drawing, or instrumental music. If your parents and tutors are wise, you are taught them because every trained faculty may be useful to you hereafter in quite unexpected ways, or because it will help to make life brighter to you and more interesting, and help you to brighten other lives than your own. If *you* are wise, you will try to grow "cunning in playing" even while you keep your sheep; in other words, you will seek to enrich your life by training your faculties and gifts, by learning to delight in the beauty of the world around you and to express that beauty in some beautiful way. You will cultivate yourselves that you may give, as well

as take, a refined and refining pleasure in all that is true and fair, all that touches and rouses the imagination or the heart. If you can sing a song, you will try to sing it well. If you can *make* a song which will move men to a pure and innocent enjoyment, you will prepare yourself to make it. If it is in you to make a tune which will set men's hearts dancing within them, you will make it. If you can only play a tune, you will be content to play it, and you will try and play it as delicately and spiritedly as you can. Whatever you can do to make men happy or good, you will feel that it is your duty to attempt it. A lad who keeps sheep may as well learn to play the harp as not, and a great deal better. It is no hindrance to duty. And it will keep him from those "idle hands" for which Satan is ever finding something to do, and will give him the dexterous fingers for which God will find much to do, and much that will help to make the world sweeter and better.

(3.) Last of all: while David did his work well, and cultivated his gifts diligently, he gave himself to the service of God. It was *the Lord* whom he served, he said, that delivered him out of the paw of the lion and out of the paw of the bear. What struck the servants of Saul most in him was that "*the Lord* was with him." "He is very skilful," they said to the King, "and very brave, very prudent and very comely: *and the Lord is with him.*" And, surely, a lad must have been noted for a simple and sincere piety of whom that was the last and chief thing to be said.

There are many ways, as you have been hearing, in which you may contribute to the pleasure of your parents and friends, and help to make both their life and your own sweeter and brighter; *but there is no way so good as being good.* The one thing they most desire for you, because they know that nothing else will make you so happy and so useful, is that you should love God and serve Him and trust in Him, and let Him save you from sin and danger. I am very thankful that so many of you elder lads and girls have promised, have vowed, to love and serve Him. I am more thankful than I can say that some of you are now preparing to take that solemn vow upon you. It is a great joy, and a great reward to your parents and teachers to see that they have not loved and taught you in vain, but have led you to the feet of the Great Teacher and Saviour. And I hope that, in due time, you may all be brought to Him, and learn that the best happiness and highest good of life come from doing his will and not your own; in living for others rather than for yourselves, in pleasing your neighbours for their good rather than in running after your own pleasure. For then I am sure the world *will* be the better and the brighter for you; and you will have fulfilled your true function, done your true work, and fitted yourselves for the true and enduring joy.

VIII.

THE BEST DISH.

"Mary hath chosen the good part."—LUKE x. 42.

IN the little village of Bethany, and while our Lord still walked the earth there lived two ladies, very true and noble ladies, although I suppose they were not very rich, and were of but small account in the great world of Judea, or in the far greater world of Rome. Although they were sisters, and no doubt had a family likeness to each other, they were very unlike each other in character and temperament, as sisters often are. Martha was a notable woman, an accomplished housekeeper, with a keen eye and a quick hand for the practical affairs of life. She had what the Americans call "faculty," and shewed herself, I dare say, as brisk and capable on their small farm as in the kitchen. She was, in fine, what some people call a *managing* woman;

what we may call in good old-fashioned English *a lady*, *i.e.* "a bread giver," and even a bread winner. Mary was of a more refined and retiring spirit—thoughtful and reflective, apt, like her great namesake, to "lay up" wise deep words in her heart, and to "ponder" them till they gave up their meaning to her. But though she was of a quiet and reflective spirit, she could be prompt enough when the opportunity came and the way was clear, as, for instance, when she broke her "alabaster," and anointed the Lord *for his burial* before the very Apostles knew that He was about to die.

For it is a grave mistake to think, you lads could hardly make a more fatal mistake than to suppose, that a thoughtful and considerate habit of mind is any hindrance to wisely prompt action. If you do not stop to think, you may indeed be more prompt to act, but you are far more likely to act in a wrong way; like poor Tom who, only the other day, ran to help his little brother so fast that he ran over him and knocked him down, and cracked his own crown, at least the skin of it, into the bargain; or like little Polly, who was in such a hurry to hand her mother the cake that she spilt her cup of tea. And, in that case, you will do more harm than good; or you will have to undo all that you have done; or you will have to leave what you have commenced incomplete, like the man who "began to build but was not able to finish." In the end you will lose far more time and energy than if you *had*

stopped to think before you began to act. Certainly the men who have done most in and for the world have been those who thought most and best.

Mary thought much; and Martha was a busy active woman, bent on getting through her household work, cumbered with many household cares. But, after all, is it quite certain that Martha *did* more than Mary because she thought less, or that she did *better?* I am by no means sure that, on the spur of real or great occasion, when a great feast was to be given or when Lazarus fell sick, Mary was not the more useful, the more resourceful, the more effective of the two. Of the two I think I would rather have had Mary even to wait on me at dinner. I am quite sure I would rather have had Mary, than Martha, to nurse me when I was ill. And it is very certain that the example of Mary has taught us the nobler lesson, and incited us to the higher course of activity.

It is well, then, that you should be busy, since Satan finds so much mischief for idle hands to do; but it is far better that you should be thoughtfully and wisely busy. And you can hardly doubt that of the two Sisters Mary was the more *wisely* occupied when, instead of fretting about the dinner, for which He cared so little, she came and sat at the feet of Jesus, comforting Him with her sympathy and devotion, for which He cared so much, and drawing new life from Him who was "the Life indeed."

I should be very sorry, however, if any of you

girls, and especially sorry if any of you elder girls, were to infer from what I have said that household duties are of no importance, or of slight importance. You may be just as religiously engaged in the kitchen as in the Church, or in the School of which many of you are so fond. Mary did not neglect her household duties to sit at the feet of Jesus, or He would hardly have been so glad to see her there. Before He came, and until his wants were supplied, she had been just as busy as Martha in preparing and serving the feast; for her sister reproaches her with having "*left* her to serve alone;" which implies, I think, that up till then Mary had taken her full share of the work. It was not till the necessary work was done that Mary left it for still higher work,—ministering to the spirit, as she had already ministered to the physical wants, of the great Teacher and Friend.

We cannot well doubt, indeed, that even the Lord Jesus, little as He cared for what we call "the good things of this life," approved of thrift, industry, skill, good sense and good taste; or that, though He was content with simple fare, He preferred to have it properly cooked and delicately served. We cannot doubt that He who, because He would suffer no waste, commanded the Apostles to gather up the fragments of the loaves and fishes with which He had fed the Five Thousand, approves of you when you prevent waste by making the most and best of the gifts of his Father's bounty. You can never

please Him by wasting or spoiling good food, or by suffering it to be wasted and spoiled. You cannot fail to please Him when you do the best you can with it, and serve it, or have it served, with a grace and a refinement which turns the simplest of meals into a feast. You may be quite sure that if Martha, when she had done her best in the kitchen and at the table, instead of pressing new dainties upon the Master, or fussing about her dishes and flasks, had felt that there were far higher things than eating and drinking, things for which He cared infinitely more; if she had sought to enter into his thoughts, and sympathize with his aims, and learn some new lesson or take some new gift of Him, He would have been just as pleased with her as He was with Mary.

Why even we ourselves are distressed if, when a friend asks us to her house, she lets us see that she is thinking of nothing but the dinner or the supper, if she fritters away the ease and pleasure of social intercourse by her anxiety as to what we shall eat and drink, by her fears lest she should not have got what we like, or lest the servants should make some stupid mistake. Even *we* feel that simple fare, carefully prepared and served, with a hearty welcome and pleasant unembarrassed intercourse, is far better, far more refreshing, than the most sumptuous feast with nothing to stimulate the mind and gratify the heart. How much more vexing and disappointing, then, must it have been to the pure and lofty spirit of Jesus to see that Martha could think

nothing but the dinner; and that, cumbered with many cares, she was losing a rare opportunity of friendly intercourse and spiritual communion!

None of you girls, I hope, will ever think yourselves too fine, or too cultivated, to attend to your domestic duties, or even, if need be, to turn up your sleeves and pin on an apron, and toss off some dainty little dish which may stimulate the appetite of the weary or the sick: for even in such humble services as these you may be pleasing and serving the Lord as truly and devoutly as in any act of public worship. But I also hope that you will not forget that there are still higher duties than these; that in ministering to the spirit you do more and better than in ministering to the body. For if there is one creature more pitiable than the fine lady who cannot condescend to the cares of the table or the house, it is the woman who degrades herself into a mere kitchen drudge, and whose soul seems never to get out of the pepper-box and the salt-cellar.

There is another point in Martha's character which you will all do well to consider, boys as well as girls. Good woman as she was, I am afraid *she had a temper*, and that she sometimes yielded to it. I think we can hear some tang of it in the words: "Lord, dost thou not *care* that my sister has left me to serve alone?" That sounds as if she were vexed, as if she felt herself "put upon" and overlooked; as if, in short, her temper had got a little the better of her. She does not speak to Mary

herself, and ask her to come and help her, but appeals to their Friend and Guest in a way that was likely to put her sister to the blush. She does not even simply ask Him to use his authority on her behalf. There is a tone of reproach and criticism in her words, reproach of Mary for neglecting her, reproach even of Jesus for permitting her to be neglected.

Now I would not have pointed out that fault in Martha if it were not a very common fault, and yet a fault for which many feel but little shame. There are a few people, I think, who are foolish enough even to pride themselves on their temper, *i.e.* their *bad* temper; as if anything bad could possibly be good to have! And there are many who confess that they *have* a temper, very much as they might say that they keep a dog. No doubt it is somewhere about the premises; but they don't hold themselves responsible for what it may choose to do. And hence they make no resolute stand against it. At this present moment one of *my* neighbours keeps a dog. This dog injures my garden, sometimes destroying a few shillings worth of plants in a single week. When I meet him—the man, I mean, not the dog; for the dog, I think, don't much care to meet me—I remonstrate with him. But he always replies, in the most innocent and engaging way, "I'm awfully sorry; but you see, Sir, the maid *will* open the front door of a morning before I am down, and the dog *will* jump straight into your garden. I

have seen him do it myself many times." It never seems to occur to him, and I have hardly the heart to suggest it, that he also should have a will of his own, a will at least as strong as that of his dog or his maid.

Well, as he speaks of his dog, so many people speak of their temper. "It *will* do it, Sir, and I can't help it." But they *can* help it, and *would* help it, if they felt they were *bound* to help it. The fact is that they think of their temper as of something detached and apart from themselves, instead of as a tyrannical and degrading passion within themselves, for all the effects of which they are responsible to God and man. I would not have *you* think of it as they do. *Your* tempers can hardly be beyond your reach as yet. Now is the time to get them well in hand. And, therefore, I beg you to remember that what your temper says *you* say, that what your temper does *you* do; and not to think or to speak of it as if it were a something separate from yourself and for which you are not responsible,—a sort of half-wild beast which somehow has made its den in your heart against your will or without your consent.

If Martha had a temper, we need not conclude that she yielded to it often. Perhaps, it only threw out a momentary spark of petulance now and then, and, if the spark set fire to anything, she was very sorry, and did her best to put it out. And I will tell you why I hope that was so. The Lord Jesus, who

was very severe on every form of malice and ill-will, who was shocked and repelled by them, "*loved*" Martha, as well as Mary her sister and her brother Lazarus; and He would not have loved a really ill-tempered woman. And though He rebukes the temper, the petulance of her reproach, "Lord, carest thou not that my sister hath left me to serve alone!" He rebukes it very tenderly, turning it off with a kindly and humorous play on words with a pun, with an equivoque, which makes his rebuke half a jest. I think He was a little amused to see the busy Martha complaining of having too much to do, as well as a little sorry to see her so troubled and careful about many things of comparatively slight importance. For there is a touch of playfulness in his reply to her. He takes an image from the very table about which Martha was so unnecessarily and unduly anxious: for the words rendered "Mary hath chosen *the good part*," mean Mary hath chosen the good *portion*, *the best dish*, the Benjamin's mess." It is as though He had said to the careful and fretted housekeeper: "You are very kind, Martha; you are doing your best to please me, and to give me as good a dinner as you can: and yet it is Mary who has brought me the best dish, the food I like most. She is nourishing and refreshing my spirit with her love and sympathy. She is giving me an opportunity of feeding her with the bread of life and the wine of the kingdom. Our fellowship with each other is the true

feast. And you, O you poor Martha, are so taken up with your dainties that you are losing the feast!"

Obviously, our Lord stoops to Martha's level, to the busy housekeeper's point of view, and playfully rebukes her for her mistake. Her mind is full of dishes and dainties, so full, and so bewildered, that she is forgetting the best dish of all. She wants to serve Him and do Him honour; but she is pre-occupied with thoughts of how she may do her best for Him. And so He teaches her that she will best serve both herself and Him by casting aside her cares, and giving herself up to the joy of communion with Him.

Now even the youngest of you can understand *that*, I think, at least in part. You know that your minds are full of many things—many thoughts and purposes, many desires and aims; that you are often careful to get this or that, and troubled if you cannot get it: and you understand that what the Lord Jesus is telling you is that, while many of these things may be very good for you, there is one thing which is better than them all, the only thing which it is absolutely necessary for you to have, because, having this, you have all. Life sets many dishes before you. It is like a large table all spread with dishes, many of which are very wholesome and pleasant, though some which are pleasant to the eye are *not* good for food, while some are positively injurious to you, and even poisonous. And your

great Teacher and Friend does not ask you to refuse any wholesome dish. But He does ask you to bear in mind that there is a best dish which is worth more to you than all the rest. He does want you to give your first and chief attention to *that*, because, if you eat of that, you can never die, and never even grow hungry any more.

Now if you ask me to name this best dish, to tell you exactly what the one thing needful is, I am a little puzzled how to reply; not, however, because I do not know what it is. I know what it is well enough, for I have often tasted it; but it has so many names, takes so many forms, that I do not know how best to put it before you. Nevertheless, I will try to tell you what it is; nay, for you will like this better, I will also try to make you find it out for yourselves.

First, I will tell you what I think the one thing needful is. I believe it is that love for God and man which quickens and sustains the true life within us, and redeems us from all anxieties for the many things of our outward life.

And, now, think for yourselves whether that is not true. Do you remember the Young Ruler whom Jesus loved because he was so lovable, so pure, devout, aspiring, but to whom, although He loved him, He said, *One thing thou lackest?* The one thing he lacked was the one thing needful, the good portion which Mary chose. What was it, then, that this Young Man, who had so much, had not?

It was love, love for God and man. Not that he did not love them at all. He loved God well enough to keep his commandments, so far as he understood them; and he loved men well enough to win their love in return. But he was not perfect in love. He did not love them well enough to sell all that he had, and give it to the poor, in order that he might share the homeless and troubled life of the Good Master who had given up all for him. He had not the love which casts out all fear and all care. He could not throw himself wholly on the goodness and bounty of God, and pursue what he felt to be the best and noblest aims at all risks and costs. He had not the love which breeds so true and constant a trust in God as to make all that is God's ours, which makes us rich even when we are poor, and strong even when we are weak, and glad even when we are sorrowful. And hence he left the best Man he had ever met, and fell short of the best and highest life of which he had ever caught a glimpse. In other words, the best dish was set before him, and he would not eat of it.

But what he lacked Mary had. She counted the world well lost, if only she could win Christ and follow Him. Nothing was too good for Him; nothing either too small or too great to be given up for Him, or consecrated to his use: *nothing*—from a dinner to the costly alabaster vase full of precious ointment. And why did she love Him with this utter devotion, this all-forsaking, all-sacrificing, all-

daring enthusiasm? Because she saw God in Him; because words of eternal life came from his mouth; because she felt that in Him the very loftiest and noblest ideals and aims of human life stood "breathing human breath" before her; because she felt that to share his life, his loving devotion to God and man, must be the highest good. Even from the little we are told of her we may be quite sure that Mary was capable of all things—all sacrifices, all toils, all heroisms; that she counted neither life nor the good things of life dear to her, if only she might engage in the service and share the love of Christ. We may feel sure, we do feel sure, that if He had said to *her*, as He said to the Young Ruler, "Sell all that thou hast, and follow me," she would have sold all that she had without a pang, and followed Him to the end of the world. In short, she knew that this all-trusting and devoted love is the best thing, the best dish or portion, Life has to offer; the one thing needful, the one thing sufficient.

Now, my dear children, I know that I am setting a very high ideal before you in calling you to strive for this pure loving devotion to God; but how can I offer you less than the best I know, the one thing that will never disappoint and never fail you? And is it not the best thing? Look around you. See how dark and toilsome and sorrowful is the life of many of the men and women whom you know, or know something of; how they scrape and stint, how they toil and plan, to put by a provision for the

future: how laden and oppressed they are with cares and fears for to-day and for to-morrow, for themselves or for their children. Do you want to be like *that?* You *will* be like it, unless you love God with all your heart; love Him so that you can trust Him to give you all you really need; love Him so that you care very little whether you are rich or poor, known or unknown, if only you know Him and are known of Him.

But if you rise into this pure, deep, and trustful love, you will be saved from all these base and vexing cares and fears. You will do your best in your several stations. You will be as diligent, as prudent, as skilful, as you can; and then you will leave the results of your faithful discharge of duty with God; fearing no evil, because you know there is no want to them that fear Him. And is not that the very best thing you can do, the best dish of which you can eat? What else has Life to offer that is half so good? How else can you enjoy your brief stay on earth half so much?

Many of you do love God already. But, remember, you do not love Him aright, you do not love Him enough, unless you *trust* Him. Do you not trust the father or the mother whom you love? Are you not sure that they will do the best they can to help you, and to make you happy? Do you fret yourselves with care lest they should leave off loving you, or with fear lest they should not give you what you really need, if they have it? But what is there

that your heavenly Father cannot give you, if He sees it will be for your good? And what is any earthly love compared with His?

To love Him supremely, with all the mind and heart and soul and strength; to love Him so as to trust Him, so as to have no fear for the body or the soul, for ourselves or for others, for time or for eternity, is simply the highest and happiest lot that can fall to any child, or to any man. Other things may fail you; but this can never fail. Other aims you can only pursue now and then; but this you can always pursue. Other possessions can only enrich this part of your life or that; but this possession will enrich and sweeten your whole life. You can always be loving Him, and trying to shew and deepen your love. And if you do thus love Him, all your life will become bright, and even its most unwelcome duties welcome. Sometimes your parents bid you do what you do not like to do, or your teachers set you lessons you do not like to learn; or, if you have gone out into the world, you have daily tasks and duties which are not always agreeable to you. But, see, how your whole life changes, and grows brighter, if you try to please God in all you do. You do not like to do what you are told to do! But if you say to yourselves, "God will be pleased if I do it, and do it cheerfully," then you can take some pleasure in doing it. You may not like to work hard at your school lessons day after day: but if you say to yourselves, "I shall be pleasing

God if I learn them as well as I can," even the most difficult lesson will become easier to you, and you will have a new and strong reason for mastering it. You may not like, or may not always like, what you have to do in the counting-house, the office, the factory, the shop; but once say to yourselves, "I shall be pleasing God by a faithful and honourable discharge of duty," and duty itself becomes pleasant to you: for what pleasure is like that of pleasing One who loves us?

And, no doubt, it is very much because God knows how much these otherwise sad and sordid lives of ours may be brightened and sweetened by our love for Him, that He both commands and beseeches us to love Him with all our soul and all our strength. That is the *first* commandment in more senses than one. If it is the most important, it is also the most inspiring. If it is the most binding, it is also the most helpful and delightful.

Love, then, the love of God, a love so true that it breeds trust, and a trust so true that it redeems us from all care and fear—this is the best dish, the best portion, the one thing needful; the one thing, lacking which, we lack all, whatever else we have. This is the dish of which Mary ate with Christ, and of which the Young Ruler refused to eat, at least for a time.

And, last of all, it is the best dish, the best portion, because it can never be taken away from us. We lose much as life goes on, more than *you* can

yet imagine. We lose health and energy both of body and of mind; the fineness of our intellectual perceptions is dulled, and the firmness of our intellectual grasp relaxed. We lose our very senses—not going out of our minds, I do not mean that, but —our eyes grow dim, and our ears hard of hearing, and our tongues trip, and our natural force is abated. We lose, or partly lose, our very memories, so that our own past grows hazy to us, or even dark. We lose the power to do much that we once loved to do, and to enjoy much that was once pleasant to us. We lose our friends, or at least the presence and use and enjoyment of our friends, losing at the same time the faculty of forming new friendships. And, at last, we lose life itself, and with it all that we have gained.

But there is one thing we never lose, if once we have had it—the love of God. We never lose the one thing needful, the one only thing which enables us to bear all other losses, and even turns them into gain. By this sacred gift, this loving trust in their heavenly Father, I have seen men sustained under all the changes and losses of time. I have seen it bring untold wealth to those who were suffering the keeenest stings of poverty. I have seen it quicken a divine health and vigour and cheerfulness of spirit in those who were called to endure the sharpest and most protracted agonies of pain. I have seen it upbear and comfort those who had lost, or were losing, the organs of sense by which we

apprehend and enjoy the fair world around us, and bend it to our use; those whose memories were failing them, and who could neither delight in the present nor recall the past. I have seen it sustain those who were compelled to part with home and friends, those who had lost all whom they loved by stroke after stroke. I have even seen it bring mysterious succours to those who had lost reason itself, and have felt that God could minister even to minds diseased in ways inscrutable to us. And I have seen it, after calming and healing all the sorrows of life, transform the very bed of death into a sanctuary of peace, or even into a scene of rapture and victory.

Can you wonder, then, that I want you, while you are still young, to possess yourselves of this potent charm, this sovereign balm for every wound, this sacred and sufficient compensation for every loss? By the mercies of God, your Father and mine, your Saviour and mine, I beseech you that, like Mary of Bethany, you accept the one thing needful, and choose that better part which can never be taken away from you.

IX.

ON CLEANSING OUR WAYS.

"Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy word."—PSALM cxix. 9.

IT is now at least twelve years, my dear children, since we began this pleasant custom of devoting one service in the year exclusively to you. For at each of these services I have preached you a sermon all to yourselves; I can count up twelve such sermons,[1] and I dare say one or two more have slipped from my memory. So that those of you who attended the first service of this sort, even if you were then only seven or eight years old, must now be young men and women of nineteen and twenty. The years have slipped by very fast; and you have slipped up almost as quickly. Hence it

[1] Four of these, the first four I delivered, will be found in *Rabbi Agur's School.* (Religious Tract Society.)

is high time, I think, that I spoke to you no longer as to children, but as to young men and women who have to meet the labours and temptations of life, its sorrows and joys. Hitherto, on all previous occasions of this kind, I have spoken mainly to the younger ones among you. To-night let me speak mainly to you elder ones, though even to you I will try to speak so simply that even the little ones may learn something from what I say.

Now, in speaking to *you*, I do not know that I can do better than open up to you the sense of the Verse I have just read; for though it is a good deal hackneyed, though a great many sermons to the young have been preached from it, yet even the most familiar words grow fresh to us if only we bring a fresh mind to them.

What the unknown Hebrew poet who wrote these words set himself to do was this:—To shew us how we may "cleanse," or make clean, the way in which we walk. And by "way" he meant, of course, our general course, mode, habit, of life. The similarity between the paths, or roads, on which we travel from place to place, and the general tenour of life which we adopt, is so obvious that it was very natural that men should early perceive it, and speak of the habitual course of a man's life as if it were a path, or highway, along which he was urging his steps, or even as a pilgrimage in which he passed from one sacred spot to another. Some paths are dirty, and some are clean; and some ways

or modes of life are foul, while others are pure. Some roads run up-hill, and some down-hill; and so some courses of life lead a man upward, and some downward. Some paths which are gay with flowers, and very pleasant to the feet, land a man at last in bogs or in impenetrable shades; while others, which are very steep and forbidding at the outset, conduct him to the heights of some heaven-kissing hill from which he may see all the world beneath his feet. And so there are ways of living, primrose paths, whose end is shame and hopeless disaster; while there are other ways, steeps of duty, which lead men to a happy and eternal home.

When the Psalmist speaks of our *way*, then, he means our *way of life*, the way in which we spend our days, the way in which we occupy ourselves from morning to night, and from year to year. And when he speaks of *cleansing* our way, he implies that, at some points at least, our way has led us through the mire. The picture in his mind was of this sort. There stood before him a young man who had not long set out on the journey of life; and who yet, to his own deep surprise and disgust, found many stains of travel already upon him. He had not meant to go wrong; as yet, perhaps, he has not gone very far wrong. And yet where did all this filth come from? And how is it to be got rid of? And if, at the very outset of the journey, he has wandered into bye-paths which have left these ugly stains upon him, what will he be like when he

reaches the end of his journey? How can he hope to keep a right course, and to present himself, without spot, before God at the last? In short, how is he to make his way clean, and to keep it clean?

Now, surely, some of you *know* that young man, and have begun to ask yourselves questions as sorrowful and anxious as his. Like him, you have not gone far on your way; and yet you suspect that more than once you have lost your way. You feel already that your heart is not so fresh and pure as it once was. You have already done some things of which you are ashamed, some things perhaps which you would not like your father and mother to know; some things which you wish, or almost wish, that God Himself did not know. Nay, some of you more than suspect, you know quite well that you have left the true way of life; that you have indulged in tempers, in frivolities, in angers and jealousies, in self-will and self-pleasing, if not in sins more open and gross, of which you yourselves disapprove—in others, and of which God disapproves *in you* as much as in any one else. There is not one of you, I am sure who, however bravely you started, with whatever pure aims and good resolves, does not admit that you have erred and gone astray; that you have done things which you ought not to have done, and have left undone things which you ought to have done. That is to say, there is not one of you who does not feel that at least the hem

of your garment has been soiled: and many of you, I dare say, feel as if you were so spotted and inconstant, so bedraggled by the mire through which you have passed, that you can hardly hope ever to be quite clean again. The more sensitive you are to every taint of moral impurity, to every taint of failure and defect, the more likely it is that, in your thoughtful and devout moments, you ask almost despairingly, "Wherewithal shall I cleanse my way?"

It is not a bad sign, but a sign of good, that you should be asking this question, asking it seriously, or even sorrowfully. For it shews at least that you know your own weakness, and want to be strong; it shews that you know your own danger, and want to be saved from it. Nor is it a bad omen, it is a good omen, that you should despair of yourselves; for that may lead you, and ought to lead you, to trust in a Power and a Goodness higher than your own. If you *were* content with yourselves, I, for one, should begin to despair of you: for who can habitually look up to that Pattern of all excellence, the Perfect Son of Man, without seeing how sadly, and in how many ways, he falls short of it? I hope, therefore, that many of you *are* seriously, if not sorrowfully, asking yourselves, How may we cleanse our ways, and keep them clean?

And if you are asking that question at all seriously, you will, I am sure, listen with attention and interest to what any wise and good man, who

has had a large experience of life, has to say in reply to it—listen with special interest and attention to what any man inspired by God has to say to it. The inspired Psalmist offers you two answers to that question which I will ask you to consider. When we go to him, and ask, "How may we cleanse our ways?" he replies, first, "*By taking heed thereto;*" and, then, "By taking heed thereto *according to God's word.*"

I. If we are to make our life pure, noble, satisfying, we are to *take heed* to it: *i.e.* we are to *think* about it, and to force ourselves to walk according to our best thoughts and aims. How wise an answer that is, you may see when I tell you that one of the greatest of living Englishmen sums up the whole teaching of the wisest German of the present century in the brief citation: "*Gedenke, zu leben.*" I quote Goethe's very words because I am speaking to you young men and women who, many of you, know what they mean. But for the sake of others I must add that "*Gedenke, zu leben*" means literally, "*Think, to live.*" Carlyle translates, "*Think of living.*" But you will all get hold of its meaning if I say that what it really comes to is this: "If you would live rightly and well, you must *think*—think how it is best to live." So that, you see, two of the wisest men of our own time are of one mind with the Psalmist who lived between two and three thousand years before them. *He* says, "If you would walk in pure and noble ways of life, *think* of your ways;"

and *they* say, "Would you live well, *think* how to live."

We may take it for granted, then, that this answer to your question is a very wise one. And I have only to ask you, Have you acted upon it? and to urge you, if you have not, to lose no time in acting upon it. You know very well that a good many children, and even a good many young men and women, never look forward and think of their life *as a whole*, and of how they may make the best of it. God has put this great and solemn gift of life into their hands; yet they never really think of it as his gift, nor ask themselves what they mean to do with it, what they *have* done with it, or how they may so use it as to shew that they are not unworthy to be trusted with it. Nay, more; many of them do not even think of it bit by bit, day by day, step by step. So far from considering what they can make of their life as a whole, how they may make it pure and fair and bright, they do not so much as ask, "What shall I do with my life *to-day*, so as to make it as clean, as fair, as useful as I can?" So far from looking along the whole journey of life, they do not even consider its separate stages: they do not stop to think, "Where will this step land me? and, if I take it, shall I be starting on a good course or on a bad?" Is it any wonder that those who are so thoughtless and inconsiderate, who act on the mere impulse of the moment, who set no high clear aim before them, or do not keep any aim stedfastly before them, and

resolutely push on to it,—is it any wonder that they often find themselves in the mud? Is it any wonder that they often wander round and round without making any real advance; and sink, again and again, into the very sloughs from which, again and again, they have been drawn out; or fall, again and again, into the very traps from which they have been set free? No; it is no wonder. For nothing good was ever yet done without thought and effort; and till they begin to *think of living*, to consider how they may find, and keep, a clear, straight, and upward path, they must go on floundering into the mire—scrambling out of it at one moment, only to fall back into it the next.

II. But this is not the whole of the Psalmist's answer. There is a second part to it; and we cannot do justice even to the first part of it till we have glanced at the second. For, though it is well to *think* of living, to think is not enough. We want a high and true standard to which to refer, by which we may measure and direct, our thoughts. And this standard the Psalmist gives us when he tells us to take heed to our ways *according to the Word of God*.

Many a man has thought of living, thought about what he would do with his life, and has been true to his thoughts, only to find himself sticking helplessly in the yellow dirt which we call "money." Not that I have a word to say against money, in its proper place. On the contrary, I have a great,

though *distant*, respect for it; for very little of it has ever come my way. And no young man starting in life, and longing to keep his way clean, can be too sure of this; that he ought to do his best to secure a sufficient provision for himself, and for those who may hereafter be dependent on him. Every man needs a certain amount of money to make him independent, to save him from being a burden on others, to lift him out of the reach of sordid and fretting cares, to set him free to take the path of study or action he finds most congenial and profitable, to enable him to lend, and do good. The great charm of wealth—if by "wealth" we mean a modest but secure provision for all reasonable needs—is that it sets a man free to serve his neighbours *for nothing*. That, indeed, is what God gives it to us for, if He does give it.

But, while wealth is a capital servant, it is a brutal master. And it is perilously apt to become the master of any man who makes it his chief aim *even for a time*. "Dirt," according to Lord Palmerston, "is only matter in the wrong place." And money becomes "dirt" when we suffer it to get into the wrong place. And it does get into the wrong place when it gets into the chief place.

Do not be deceived, young men. It is very easy to get rich, if only you care to pay the price for it. Let any man of fair ability set wealth before him as his chief aim: let him give his whole mind to it, let him pursue it stedfastly, refusing to be daunted

and driven back by any failure or disappointment; let him be resolute to do any kind of work, and make any sacrifice, which the pursuit demands; and he will as surely get his wealth as the sun will rise to-morrow. The reason, and the *only* reason, why so many men who love wealth never reach it is, because they do not love it enough; because they *will* try to get other things as well—a little pleasure, or a little self-respect, or the respect of their fellows. And the only thing easier than getting rich is to get selfish and miserable both in the pursuit and in the possession of riches.

Many a young man who thinks his chief aim is to get on in the world is not half so base and mercenary as he thinks himself. He *can't* be hard and selfish enough, or he *won't* sacrifice every wholesome avocation, and present enjoyment, and kindly service, simply to bear a load of riches in a miserable old age. Pleasure, enjoyment, culture, the respect and goodwill of men, and of those whom they deem the best men,—all these are great and attractive aims with the young, and constantly divert them from the mere pursuit of wealth. And some of *you*, I suppose, take a great deal of pains, expend a good deal of thought, in order to secure these, or some of them.

But ought even these to be your ruling aim? I have no word to say against enjoyment; still less have I any word to say against culture; and still less against seeking the goodwill and respect of men. While you are young, you *ought* to enjoy your youth.

Life should be full of charm for you. But, remember, you cannot *always* be young: and if you have no other, no higher, aim than this, what will become of you when youth has fled? And is it likely that, pursuing pleasure with all your might, you will keep your way *clean* even while you are young?

Self-culture, again, is a proper and noble aim; and one which in these days of schools and examinations, you are likely, at least in a certain superficial way, to pursue. But if, as your supreme aim, you seek to train and accomplish your intellect, your imagination, your perception and love of beauty, though you may achieve for yourselves a great gain, yet, remember, there are hard, stern, ugly facts in life, and in death, with which no refinement, no accomplishments, will enable you to deal. Our greatest poets have taxed their greatest powers tc shew how cold, and loveless, and miserable the mere man of culture becomes when he has reached his end, or when he is brought into contact with want, loss, pain, bereavement, the infirmities of age, the approach of death.

So, too, the respect and goodwill of men is a priceless treasure, if it be honestly obtained, worth far more than all that wealth can buy or covet. But there are times—and such times come to us all—when even the neighbours who admire us most, or love us best, can do little, can do nothing, for us. They cannot minister to a mind diseased, nor to a haunted conscience, nor to a broken heart. They

cannot take us by the hand, and lead us through the dark valley, with its cold stream, which connects this world with the next. In all the great moments and experiences of life every man must stand alone, absolutely alone, unless God be with him, unless the Great Spirit who dwells, or may dwell, in our spirits, sustain and guide him.

Now I wonder whether you see, children, what we have been doing for the last few minutes? We have been *thinking of life;* thinking of it as *a whole;* thinking how we may make the best of it, and finding that most men do not make the best of it if they are left to their own unguided thoughts. Left to themselves, they pursue the aims of which I have spoken—success in business, enjoyment, self-culture, the esteem of their fellows. Left to yourselves, *you* will be apt to follow these aims, although, as I have shewn you, no one of them, nor all of them combined, can satisfy the cravings and meet the wants of your whole nature; although they are sure to fail you at the very times when you most need succour and support.

Merely to think of living is not enough, then. If we would find our true ruling aim, our chief and proper good, we must think of living *according to God's word.* This is the last thing I shall ask you to do, the last and the best; so give me your best attention.

You are young. You are just starting, or you have just started, in life. And you have the ardour,

the generosity, the aspirations of youth. You want to make the best and the most of your life; you would like to make it a pure and beautiful thing. And since wise and much-experienced men, both of the old world and of the new, tell you that life can only be made pure and beautiful as we think of it, and think of it according to the teaching of God's word, you naturally ask what the teaching of God's word is, and how you may bring it to bear on your way, or manner, of life. And what you want to see, I want still more to shew you.

But you must not be *too* ambitious, nor strive to wind yourselves too high for mortal man beneath the sky. You must remember that every life has its limits, limits which it cannot safely or happily attempt to pass. You are *here*, in the world, in the body, in an organized society, with friends and neighbours all about you. And all these—your body, your neighbours, and even the world at large—have claims upon you which you must meet as honourably and fully as you can. The body demands food, raiment, exercise, healthy and pleasurable excitements. Society demands conformity with its laws and rules; the world, that you take part in its toil and strife. And these are demands which you cannot neglect with justice, or with safety. You *must* work, therefore; you must earn a place and a livelihood. You must train, exercise, and nourish the body. You must make yourselves as wise, as able, as useful, as variously accomplished

and agreeable, as you can, in order that you may win the esteem of the social circle in which you move, and learn to serve and gratify it in all honest ways.

And the Word of God frowns on none of these necessities, none of these limitations. On the contrary, it *bids* you work and thrive; it encourages you to serve and please your neighbours: it enjoins you to train and gratify body and mind in all innocent and laudable ways. But it also bids you remember *God* as well as man. It bids you remember that you have a soul as well as a body. It bids you remember that moral virtues and graces are still more valuable than mental gains and shining parts. It bids you remember that there is a world above and beyond this present world, a life above and beyond this mortal life; and it warns you to provide for *that* as well as for *this*. Nay, more: it asks you to believe that God is more than man, the soul more than the body, virtue better than pleasure, goodness better than gain, and the life to come more and better than the life which now is. And it demands that when the claims of God clash with those of man, as they sometimes will, or the claims of the soul clash with those of the body, or the claims of virtue and goodness with those of gain and pleasure, or the claims of eternity with those of time, that you sacrifice the lower claims to the higher, that you sacrifice passing and inferior interests to interests which are noble and enduring.

These are the demands of the Word of God: and you will, I am sure, admit them to be very reasonable, and therefore very binding upon you. Mark, then, how they bear on your daily life.

You want to make your life clean—*i.e.* pure, bright, beautiful—and to keep it clean. If, then, you are conscious that you have already contracted some stains, some pollutions, by wandering in sinful and miry ways, the Divine Word bids you repent, bids you go to God your Father, and, humbly confessing your sins, trust in his love for cleansing and forgiveness. It shews you that you *may* trust in his forgiving love; for it shews you how, in his love, He had foreseen your sins, and made a Sacrifice to take away your sins, and the sin of the whole world. You may well trust in that love, then. And if you do trust in it, it will cleanse you from all your stains.

And now, being cleansed, you want to *keep* clean. How are you to do that? Not by neglecting your daily work, but by doing it as for God; *i.e.* by doing it as God would have you do it, by doing it in a faithful, generous, and kindly spirit; by using your gains for good and noble ends, for your neighbour's good as well as for your own; by renouncing any gain which you can only get through cheating or injuring a neighbour: by making men feel that they can trust you, and depend on you, because you love God and walk by his will.

To walk in a clean way, *i.e.* to live a pure, bright, religious life, you will not need to renounce even

your games, sports, amusements, or to go into them with only half a heart, as if you thought them "unworthy of an immortal creature." You will need, rather, to remember that you are mortal, as well as immortal, and that health of body tends to health of soul. You will, rather, aim to take *God* into all your pleasures and amusements: *i.e.* to keep them pure, and fresh, and innocent; to pursue them in a generous and considerate temper; to study how your playmates and companions may have their full share of the amusement in hand; and to shun all amusements that are injurious to health, or that excite greedy and selfish passions, or that lead you into bad company or bad habits.

If you would walk in clean ways, walk by the Word of God, you will not need to abate your ardour for self-culture. You will try, rather, to learn as much as you can, to accomplish yourselves as variously as you can; to lay hold with both hands of that Wisdom which the wisest of men declared to be a veritable tree of life to all that laid hold upon her: but your motive will be—not simply your own culture or advancement, but—a strong and sincere desire to teach and serve your fellows, to make the best use of the gifts which God has bestowed upon you, to fit yourselves for heaven as well as for earth, for eternity as well as for time, for the service of God as well as for the service of man.

If you would walk in clean paths by the Word of God, you will not cease from, you will not relax,

your efforts to win the respect and goodwill of your neighbours; you will be more than ever bent on securing it in all dutiful and honourable ways. But you will seek to gain influence with them, not that you may get your own way with them and make them serve your will or subserve your personal interests; but that you may help to guide and confirm them in ways that are good, good *for them*, as well as for you.

In short, your life will grow pure and beautiful just because you make God and his will your supreme aim; just because your life will be a pure and beautiful answer to the familiar prayer:

> Teach me, my God and King,
> In all things Thee to see;
> And what I do in anything,
> To do it as for Thee.

This, then, is the final result of all our thinking about life, all our thinking according to God's Word. And I put it to you, young men and women—nay, I put to you all, old men and children as well as young men and maidens; if you make *this* your aim, and try to live such a life as I have sketched, whether such a life will not be approved by men and blessed by God; whether, therefore, it is not the very best and happiest life at your command. If you think it is, set it before you as *your* ideal of life; and ask grace of God that, living by his will, you may live in peace and joy for ever. In all your ways acknowledge God, and He shall direct your paths.

X.

SELF-CONTROL.

"So he brought down the people unto the water. And the Lord said unto Gideon, Every one that lappeth of the water with his tongue, as a dog lappeth, him shalt thou set by himself; likewise every one that boweth down upon his knees to drink. And the number of them that lapped, lifting their hand to their mouth, was three hundred men; but all the rest of the people bowed down upon their knees to drink water. And the Lord said unto Gideon, By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand: let all the other people go, every man unto his place."—JUDGES vii. 5–7.

HAT king, marching to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and take counsel whether he is able, with ten thousand, to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?" *That*, certainly, seems the prudent course to take, as even the Lord Jesus, who was not a man of war, but the Prince of peace, could see. How

foolish was it of Gideon, then, with only three hundred men to go up against more than a hundred times as many, against a host which had settled down on the vast plain of Jezreel like a cloud of locusts? And yet, *was* it foolish? "Even with many legions," says the great Roman historian (Tacitus), "it is always *the few* who win the battle:" and in a night attack, as every soldier knows, when an immense camp is to be surprised in the dark, the fewer men the better, so that they be sufficient to turn the surprise into a rout. How could it be foolish when, besides conforming with military rule, it was the command of the only wise God? We might be sure that his command was wise, even though we could not see the wisdom of it. But, here, we can see the wisdom of it, and that in two ways—a military way, and a moral way.

First of all, a few men were better than many for a night surprise; only these few must be brave men, and men who could hold themselves well in hand; men, therefore, who could be well held in hand by their captain or leader. To sift the bravest and coolest spirits from his army, Gideon took two steps, both by Divine direction. The children of Midian, *i.e.* the Arabs of the Eastern desert, had swept across the Jordan into the fertile lands cultivated by the children of Israel. A hundred and thirty thousand of them were encamped on the plain of Jezreel. Gideon, so soon as he was sure

that God had called him to the task of rolling back this great tide of invasion, sent out a summons to the neighbouring tribes. More than thirty thousand men responded to his summons, and gathered round him on Mount Gilboa, a range of hills which overlooked the great plain. Thirty thousand against a hundred and thirty thousand seemed none too many. But it *was* too many. Hence Gideon caused the proclamation to be made which, by the law of Moses was always to be made when the armies of Israel came in sight of the foe (Deut. xx. 8): *viz.* that whosoever was faint-hearted or afraid was to return to his own house, lest his comrades' hearts should "melt" as well as his heart; *i.e.* lest his cowardice should infect his neighbours. That was a wise rule: for cowards in an army are worse than useless; they are dangerous; when they run, they leave gaps in the line through which the enemy may pass, even if they do not draw their braver comrades into running away with them. Now when this proclamation was made to Gideon's army, a shameful thing took place. Two-thirds of these volunteer soldiers dared to write themselves down poltroons, by deserting the standard of their country at its utmost need. Brave enough at a distance, when they looked down from the mountains, and saw the whole plain swarming with foes, the hearts of twenty thousand of them began to faint and melt within them, and they went off every one to his own place.

Thus Gideon was left, with only ten thousand, to encounter, not twenty, but more than a hundred and twenty thousand. Surely *these* were none too many! Yes, even these were too many. And so they were sifted again. At the foot of the mountain lay "the well of *Harod*," "the well of *Trembling*," as it was called, because the hearts of so many trembled that day; a well whose waters overflowed into a large pool or small lake. To this Pool, towards the enemy therefore, Gideon led his ten thousand, and took note of how they carried themselves when they reached the cool living water. Most of the men, heated by the march, flung themselves on their knees and buried their faces in the stream, thinking only how they might most quickly quench their burning thirst. But among them there were three hundred brave and wary men who, even under the pangs of thirst, could not forget that they were in the presence of an enemy, and that it behoved them therefore to be on the alert. Instead of flinging themselves recklessly on the ground, they simply scooped up a little water in the hollow of their hands, and lapped or sipped it, even as a dog laps while he runs—on the watch for any ambush, prepared for any surprise. These, I dare say, were the veterans of the little army, men who had seen war before, and knew its perils, and felt how much even a moment's carelessness might cost them. And *these* were the men, marked out by their own wariness and self-control, by whom God meant to

save Israel from its foes. All the rest may have been brave men; but they had shewn that they were unwary and self-indulgent, apt to think of only the present moment, men who would fly on the spoil when they should be driving on in pursuit. Hence they too were packed off, every man to his own place, and Gideon was left with his brave three hundred to encounter a hundred times three hundred four or five times told.

That looks like fearful odds. But the odds were not so fearful as they look. For, after all, these men were wanted mainly to make a noise, to scare the Arabs into flight. And, meantime, Gideon had summoned the men of Ephraim to guard the fords of the Jordan and of all the streams which ran into the Jordan, so that when the Arabs fled, they might be slain as they crossed the River or its affluents.

The end justified the means, proved the wisdom of them. When the night was well advanced, Gideon armed his three hundred each with a trumpet, a torch, and an earthenware pot or jar in which to hide the flaming end of the torch till it was wanted. They crept stealthily down the hill, through the darkness, till they reached the edge of the vast sleeping camp. And then, when Gideon gave the signal, every man dashed his big pitcher or jar on the ground, blew his trumpet with all his force, and waved his flaming torch, making the night hideous with the din and the glare. A

panic fell on the host, and there ensued a "slaughter grim and great," so great, so grim, that "*the day of Midian*" became a proverb for slaughter, a proverb in use right down to the time of the prophet Isaiah (Chap. ix. 4). Many of the Arabs turned their swords against their fellows; and many of those who fled were slain at the Fords, or in the pursuit which gathered behind them: for, as the day dawned and advanced, the whole country-side turned out against them, and even their chiefs, the Raven and the Wolf, were taken and slain.

God's way was a wise way, then; and we can see it to have been a wise way even from a military point of view. It was also wise from a *moral* point of view. For if we ask, Why were thirty thousand too many, and why were even ten thousand too many, for the encounter with a hundred and thirty thousand? the sacred Chronicler replies: God knew that, if any natural explanation of this great deliverance had been possible, the men of Israel would have jumped at it; if they could anyhow have taken the credit of it to themselves, they would have taken it, and have refused to see the hand of the Lord stretched out to save them: "And the Lord said unto Gideon, The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, *lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me.*" God wanted the men of Israel to know that it was *He* who had saved them, and not they themselves; and therefore He saved

them by the three hundred, and not by the thirty thousand or the ten.

This is what the Bible tells us about it. But what men often tell us is, that God is a jealous God who wants all the glory of his acts, of his achievements, for Himself, and will not share that glory with another. Which is quite true, I suppose, if only we understand it in the right sense; though, in the sense in which it is too often understood, it is a base libel, a most pernicious lie.

My dear children, even though an angel out of heaven should tell you that God is jealously and selfishly set on his own glory, and on giving as little credit to men as He can, *do not believe him*. It is not true. It is shamefully untrue. It is a mere libel on our Father in heaven. For the glory of God is his goodness; and He is never so happy as when He is doing us good. It was *because He wanted to do good* to the children of Israel, that He made it plain to them that it was He who had saved them, and not they themselves.

Suppose they had defeated that great Arab host, which was like the locusts for multitude, purely by their own valour and skill, and had gone about puffed up and bragging of their own great deeds, would that have been good for them? Was it not infinitely more for their good to learn that God was with them and for them, that He loved them and would always save them from their foes if they took his advice; that He was their true Lord and King,

and that they needed no other, because no other either could or would do half as much for them as He would do?

This was the lesson He tried to teach them when He saved them by the three hundred. And, again, the end justified the means. For Gideon did both learn and teach this lesson. Though it was so evidently God who had saved the men of Israel, and had proved Himself to be their Lord by shewing Himself to be their Minister, they were foolish enough to give most of the credit of their salvation to Gideon. But when they came to Gideon, and asked him to rule over them because *he* had delivered them out of the hand of Midian, Gideon laughed at them. He would not hear of their request. It was *God* who had saved them, he said; and therefore it was God alone who should rule over them:[1] for would they not want saving again? and who could save them but God only?

This, then, is the story of Gideon; and this is the moral of the story—that God wants to rule over us only that He may save us; or, to put it in another way: God wants us to know that it is He who *has* saved us, in order to assure us that He is always with us and for us, and that He will go on serving us and saving us to the end.

Now I could say a great deal to you on such a

[1] Judges viii. 23, 24.

moral as this; and I almost wish that I had taken it for my theme. But I did not take it. It is not the story of Gideon on which I have promised to speak to you, but the story of the three hundred brave men who were content to sip the water of the mountain well, while their comrades flung themselves on their faces and guzzled it till they were full. And, I dare say, some of you wonder what I am going to make of it, how I can bring it to bear on your daily life and duty. For you may say, "*We* shall never be in the position of the Three Hundred, never be brought to a stream of which, if we drink at all, we must drink it in the face of an enemy; *we* have not to choose between a wary sipping of water, and abandoning ourselves to a reckless and greedy enjoyment of it."

But that is a pure mistake on your part. For what I want to shew you is that you *have* to make, and *do* make, *this very choice* almost every hour that you live; and that the whole worth of your life turns on the kind of choice you make.

I doubt, indeed, whether there is any one lesson you so much need to learn as that of self-rule, any habit which you so much need to form as that of self-control—the lesson taught, the habit illustrated, by the story of the Three Hundred. *They* felt, I suppose, that there were other and better things than the gratification of appetite, even when appetite was most craving and imperative. They felt that, while gratifying an appetite, they might lose

life itself, or all that made life worth having. And, hence, they controlled their thirst, or their craving to indulge it, innocent as that craving was in itself, and lawful and right as it would have been to indulge it had the time been favourable to indulgence. And it is of the very first importance that you should share that feeling, and refuse to gratify cravings, appetites, desires, which may be quite natural and innocent in themselves, but which, nevertheless, it may be wrong of you to indulge, or wrong to indulge to the full.

The great difficulty is to make you sensible of your danger—to get you to believe that you must control the most natural and healthy cravings *on peril of your life*. You are like the comrades of the brave Three Hundred. You see no ambush, you suspect no danger, and cannot understand why, when you are so thirsty, you should not fling yourselves on your faces and drink of the cool water as hard as you like. You can easily understand, indeed, that the poor neglected children you meet in the streets, or see in the workhouse, may eat or drink too much when they get a chance, or be too eager for gain if they see a chance of getting gain, or rush at any pleasure which comes in their way. But you, who have been brought up in pious comfortable homes, trained in good habits, provided with all you need—what danger can there be for you?

Alas, there is much danger, constant danger, terrible danger, even for you. And I want to

convince you of it; for how can I expect that you will be on your guard against it unless you believe that it exists?

Well, now, listen. I have known many young people as happily placed, as well bred and trained as you, as full of promise and hope, who, simply because they had not learned to control their appetites and cravings, have ruined themselves in health and reputation, in body and soul. I could tell you by the hour of ministers' sons and daughters, and deacons' sons and daughters, who have brought themselves to an early grave, or are dying in workhouses, or are shut up in asylums, for no other reason than this—that they indulged their craving appetites till they could no longer control them. Why, at this very moment, I can sorrowfully recall to mind at least a dozen men and women, some of them not much older than the elder of you, who have thus become the shame and the misery of parents who were once as proud and fond of them as your fathers and mothers are of you. And I will venture to say that there is hardly a grown-up person in this place to-night who could not tell you of children whom he once loved and admired who have lost themselves on this perilous road.

How, then, can those who love *you* but have their fears for you, their anxieties about you? Your danger is the greater precisely because you do not suspect it. *We* did not suspect it when we were young any more than you do. But we have no

doubt of it now. And many a man of my own age as he looks back is disposed to say that, either for want of wise teaching or through lack of self-control, most men spend the first half of their lives in forming habits which they have to spend the latter half of their lives in breaking; and that is a doleful waste of time and force from which we would fain save you, if we can.

Take an illustration which touches me at least close home. Some of you elder lads, I suppose, have already learned to smoke. With infinite pains you have conquered the nausea which the first taste of tobacco produced. And your reward for this heroic effort will probably be, that some day your doctor will tell you that you have injured your health by it, and that you must give it up; while, by that time, it may be even harder for you to do without it than it is now to do with it. Many of you, I suppose, too, both boys and girls, have conquered the natural disgust with which you first tasted beer or wine, and can now take it without dislike. And, probably, your reward will be that as life goes on, even if you never fall into a fatal and shameful craving for it, your doctor will tell you that it is mere poison to you, and that you must break off a habit which you found it so hard to acquire.

These are only illustrations, remember; for what I want you to see is, that self-control is required at every moment, along the whole range of your habits, and through the whole course of your life. From

our present point of view, it may be just as wrong to drink too much water as to drink too much wine; just as wrong to eat too much wholesome food as to eat food which is unwholesome; just as wrong to give too much time to play, and to be too fond of it, as not to play at all; just as wrong to be too eager to make money, and to get on in the world, as to be too lazy to do any work well. Of course, it is quite right to drink when you are thirsty, and to eat when you are hungry, and to play when your work is done, and to be diligent in business when you have business to do. It is only the *too much* against which you need to be on your guard. It is only against being too hotly set on any object that we warn you. It is only the habit of controlling cravings and desires which are likely to run away with you that we invite and beseech you to form, which we say you *must* form if you would not injure your health, your reputation, your usefulness.

Our counsel to you is: Hold yourselves well in hand. Do not suffer any appetite of the body, or any ambition of the mind, to master you. Be masters of yourselves, of all your appetites and of all your desires. Sip the water, or the wine, of life, like the Three Hundred. Lap at it as you go on your way, and keep a good look-out for the enemies that may lurk in it or around it. But do not, like their rejected comrades, fling yourselves on your knees to it, and drink as if your only business in the world was to get your fill of pleasure, or of

gain, and to gratify your appetites as they rise within you.

And if you wish to know how you are to set about acting on this advice, I must point you to the Three Hundred once more. They felt that life was more than meat; that the freedom and honour of their country was more than the slaking of their thirst, and must be put and kept before it. Learn from them, then, to keep a high and noble aim stedfastly before you, an aim which must be pursued, if need be, at the cost of appetite and desire: and let that aim be the highest of all, *viz.* the love and service of God. Do what you honestly believe He would have you do. Be sure that He is always with you, that He loves you, that He is trying to save you from all inordinate and evil desires, to deliver you from the bonds of every evil habit, to give you the command of all your faculties and powers, to help you to put the best things first, and to keep your highest aims before all lower and inferior aims.

Would you like to have a pattern, an example, of what you ought to be and do in order to attain this habit of self-control? You may find it in Jesus Christ our Lord—find it most of all in his meekness and gentleness. For it is, by "the meekness and the gentleness of Christ," that St. Paul beseeches us to subdue all fleshly cravings, and to cast down all the "imaginations" which exalt themselves against God and against our true life in Him.

Now to be meek is to be able to bear pain and

wrong without murmuring. And to be gentle is to be able to act without violence, without vehemence, without any undue or excessive yielding to our natural passions. In fine, meekness and gentleness are but the passive and active sides of that very self-restraint, or self-control, to which I have been urging you. Look to Christ, then. Remember Him. Imitate Him. Try to be meek when you are provoked to anger, or when you are called to suffer pain and loss because you *will* do that which is right. Try to be gentle in your daily conduct and pursuits, to gratify your cravings and follow your aims with temperance, sobriety, and a thoughtful consideration for the wishes and aims of those about you which will preserve you from pushing, from violence, from greediness and selfishness. For if you take the meekness and gentleness of Christ for your ideal, and strive toward it, and pray for grace to live by it, you will acquire the self-control which will be your best safeguard amid all the temptations to which you are exposed; since He who gave you Christ will also give you the virtues of Christ, the mind and the heart which were in Him.

God grant, my dear children, that you all may both seek and find that self-mastery which He displayed in all He did; that so you may be saved from the shipwreck which has overtaken so many of our neighbours and friends, whose violent delights had violent ends, and be enrolled among those by whom God will yet save Israel.

XI.

KICKING CALVES.

"Thy calf, O Samaria, hath cast thee off:" or (as the words have been rendered), "Thy calf hath kicked thee, O Samaria:" or even, "Thy calf, O Samaria, hath kicked thee off."—HOSEA viii. 5.

RENDER them how we will—and I have only given you three out of at least half a dozen possible translations[1]—it cannot be denied that the words have a quaint sound; or that, at the first blush, they suggest a ludicrous figure at which some of you may be tempted to laugh. And there is no

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[1] Some of the renderings of which this brief compressed phrase is susceptible yield a very different sense to that which is given above, and have their advocates among good scholars: *e.g.* "Thy calf hath kicked *me*, O Samaria;" and, again, "*I* have cast off thy calf, O Samaria." I do not pretend to determine which of all the possible renderings is the more accurate. I simply take that of the Authorised Version, and try to shew that it yields a very good sense.

harm in your laughing at it, if you like ; for there is no reason why we should not bring our smiles, as well as our tears, into the Presence of God. Mirth may be just as holy as grief, for it may be quite as healthy to the soul. And if it should be our aim to do *all* we do "as unto the Lord," we should, obviously, do our laughing unto Him no less than our weeping. Both wit and humour are to be found in the Bible ; and if they are in the Bible, they are put into it, I suppose, in order that we may enjoy them.

I am very far from denying, then, that there is something ludicrous in the notion of a boy trying to drive a calf and getting kicked by it, or trying to ride a calf and getting kicked off by it. If you were to see such a thing happen in the street, you could hardly help laughing at it ; some of you, I dare say, would laugh at it much more heartily than at the finest stroke of verbal wit ; for *that* is a rough kind of joke which even the youngest of you could understand and appreciate. And if you would laugh should you see it in the street, why should you not laugh when you see it in the Bible ? *God is in the street,* as well as in the Bible, though too often we look for Him only in the Bible, and forget that He is also in the street.

But though you may laugh at the figure called up by Hosea's words for a moment, I am sure you will not laugh at it long. The instant you begin to understand what his words mean, you will grow

grave enough; for you will find that they have a very grave, and even a very sad, meaning,—a meaning full of admonition and instruction for us, as well as for the people of Israel.

Samaria was the centre and capital of the northern kingdom of Israel, as Jerusalem was the centre and capital of the southern kingdom of Judah. And hence the prophets said, "O Samaria!" as naturally as they said, "O Jerusalem!" and for the same reason: in each case they applied the name of the capital city to the whole kingdom of which it was the centre. Each of these cities, too, was a sacred city, a centre of worship as well as a centre of business and government. There was a temple in each of them; and in the temple certain symbols of the Divine presence and activity. But while at Jerusalem there were the ark, the mercy-seat, the tables of the law, the rod that budded, at Samaria, on Mount Gerizim, they had only the Golden Calf and the emblems of its worship. When this Calf was first set up, it may have been intended, like the cherubim, as nothing more than a natural symbol of the presence and power of Jehovah. I think it was intended for nothing more at first. But from the very first there was this danger in it, that it too closely resembled the animal forms which were common in heathen temples, and notably in those of Egypt—these animal forms being very apt, as experience had shewn, to breed a kind of worship which gave free play to animal lusts.

At best, moreover, the Calf was "a graven image," and was therefore a standing and flagrant violation of the law which God had given to Israel. Nor was it long before this sin avenged itself upon them, before the ten tribes of Israel sank into the idolatries of the nations round about them, with all the unbridled license of their nameless rites, their degradation of God and man; putting no more restraint on their carnal passions and lusts than the beasts whose forms they placed in their temples, and even making the indulgence of these lusts part of their religious service and duty.

Now men grow like the gods they worship. And as the Israelites took their conception of God from the animal rather than from the spiritual part of their nature, it soon came to pass that the animal part of their nature prevailed over the spiritual. But man is far more and better than a beast. As soon, therefore, as he suffers the beast in him to prevail, he not only sinks below the level of manhood; he also grows worse than the beasts and sinks below *their* level. What they do by the law of their nature, he does *against* the law of his nature: and, sinning against the law he ought to obey, he grows steadily worse and worse, wickeder and more wicked, weaker and more weak.

Hosea paints a dreadful picture of the impotence and degradation into which the Israelites had sunk through their false worship, their false conception of what God was and of what He required of them.

He tells us that they had become greedy, selfish, mutinous; that their lusts burned like an oven, which the more you feed it the hotter it glows; that they had cast off all restraint, all decency, and rebelled against all law and authority, human as well as Divine: that, while they were accumulating the luxuries which were sure to attract a foreign invader, they were so weakened by their strifes and divisions, their impatience of all discipline, their loss of manliness and patriotism, as to be unable to resist him when he came (see Chapters iv. and vii.) *And so their Calf had kicked them*, even the Golden Calf which they worshipped. Their reward for worshipping him was that they had grown impotent, vicious, unmanly, unable to defend themselves against the foe whom their wealth attracted and their disorders provoked.

Nay, more: unless they speedily renounced him, and returned to the God of their fathers, against whom they had revolted, their Calf would not only kick them, but *kick them off*. For what could *he* do for them when the fierce Assyrians swept down on the land? Could *he* deliver them? There was nothing in him, or behind him, no might to defend them, no power to save. They would simply find themselves abandoned by the god in whose foul service they had sacrificed their manhood, their unity, their strength, and fall before the sword of the foe, or be led captive by him into a strange land.

So that you see there is a very grave and solemn

warning in Hosea's words, however quaintly they may sound at first. There is a principle in them, a principle which pervades human life as well as the whole Bible, a principle as familiar to human wisdom and experience as it is to the Word of God. And this principle is, *that every sin carries in itself its own retribution*, and is sure to avenge itself upon us if we fall into it: or, in other words, that "punishment is only the other half of sin." But the special value of these words is that they state this familiar principle in a new and striking way, embody it in a figure which brings it home to us, a figure which makes the principle fresh to us, and so memorable, that we cannot easily forget it. For, now, we may say, not simply, "Every sin involves its own punishment," but, "Every calf we worship is sure to kick us, or even to kick us off:" and I need not tell you which of these sayings we are the more likely to be struck with and to remember.

This, then, is the principle which I am about to illustrate and apply, which I wish to fix in your memories and impress on your hearts. And there are so many illustrations of it quite level to your understanding and experience that my only difficulty is which to choose, and where to begin. But, though comparatively few of you are *little* children, though many of you are so well taught as to have carried off prizes at high schools and grammar schools, and so well disposed that you are members of Christ's Church, it will be safest and kindest to

begin with the little ones, to begin at the bottom of the scale, and to rise gradually as we go on.

Now I suppose there is not one of you so young and untaught but that you will understand me when I say, that whatever we love best and pursue most heartily, *that*, for the time at least, is our god; or, as only too often we love best that which is not best worthy of our love, perhaps we had better call it, not our "god," but our "calf." For the moment at least, we look to it for the happiness, or the gratification, we most crave, and serve and follow it with our supreme affection or desire. St. Paul tells us of certain men who made their very "belly" their god; and our Lord Himself tells us of others who made their wealth their god, and whom He warned that they could not serve both God and Mammon. But, happily for us, whenever we set up any of these false gods and worship them, they kick us, or kick us off: *i.e.* they not only injure, they also wound and disappoint us; they abandon us when we most need help, and leave us sprawling in a dust which covers us with what may prove to be a very wholesome shame.

Look at some of these calf-worshippers, then, and mark how their god treats them.

Take, for instance, the greedy boy who puts no restraint on his appetite; who longs not so much for food as for forbidden food, or for those richer kinds of food which are not wholesome for him. To gratify his appetite, he will do things which are mean,

selfish, wrong. And, at last perhaps, he has his will, gets what he wants, and eats till he can eat no more. What follows? Stomach-ache, headache, sickness, the doctor, with his potions and his pills. That is to say, the calf which Little Glutton worshipped has kicked him, and kicked him in his tenderest part, just where he feels it most. He, who would always be eating if he could, turns sick at the very smell of food. He, who craves nothing but rich savours and sweet juices, is dosed and drenched with nauseous drugs. And it will be well for him if he takes the warning, and so gets off with a mere kick or two. For if he does not, the greedy boy will grow up into a greedy man, pampering and gorging his appetite, making, as St. Paul says, his belly his god, until at last his calf kicks him off into all the miseries of incurable indigestion, or even into the dust and ashes of a premature grave.

Or take the case of a vain foolish girl, who gives herself great airs when she goes to a new school, talks big about her "pa" and her "ma," her home, her servants, her dresses, her friends, her pony, or "our carriage"; seeks in all ways, in short, to draw attention to herself and to lift herself above the heads of her companions. When she is found out, her fibs detected or her foolish self-complacency resented and exposed, may we not say that her Calf has kicked her, humbled her to the dust, so that she who wanted to be admired is despised, and, instead of

being raised above the level of her fellows, is thrust down below their level? Her sin has found her out, has wrought its own punishment, we say. But let us also say, and remember, that, in the strange mercy of God, she has been punished by and for her sin in order that she may learn what an ugly sin it is, learn to hate and to renounce it. Let us remember that, by her very punishment, God is seeking to save the vain foolish girl from growing up into a still more vain and foolish woman, and thus to spare her a still deeper humiliation and shame.

From these two illustrations, drawn from boy and girl life, those of you who are a little older will see for yourselves, I think, in how many ways the figure of Hosea may be applied, in how many forms of warning it comes home to you, and indeed to us all. Did time permit, I might ask you to reflect more at length on the dreadful fact that men have made idols of their very sins; to consider how they have worshipped, and still worship and serve, such sins as Drunkenness and Licentiousness more than they worship and serve God—sacrificing their *all* to them, their fair name, their bright prospects, their health, their wives and children, their very souls. Alas, how many whom we have known and loved have been befooled, how many lives, once full of promise, have been laid waste, how many happy homes have been kicked down by these foul and sordid calves! How many hearts are there even in this

small Congregation that ache and throb as my words revive their saddest memories and recall the failure of their fondest hopes! I myself have seen young men as bright and able, and young women as pure and loveable, as the best of you overmastered by evil lusts, and drawn more and more deeply into their service, and at last flung off into irreparable ruin! And, therefore, I beseech you to take the warning, on which I cannot now dwell, and to be on your guard against the first approaches of evil.

I cannot now dwell upon this warning simply because I have still to point out to you that—not only the base passions which all reasonable men condemn, but also—our best affections, our plainest duties, may be exalted into the place of God, and thus be turned into Calves which will only too surely kick us, or kick us off, before they have done with us.

The first thought with most of you young men is, I suppose, how you are to earn your bread, by what kind of labour and service you are to secure yourselves a livelihood and a suitable place in the world. And when you have chosen your vocation, you, very properly, trust to your industry, your intelligence, your energy, your fidelity to the duties confided to you, to make your way, to rise in the world, to secure a competence, if not a fortune. In this you do well. It is your plain and obvious duty to earn your daily bread by daily toil; and to look for success in life to your devotion to the duties

entrusted to you, and to the intelligence and the diligence with which you discharge them. But as you go on, and get on, you may be tempted to snatch at success by taking some mean advantage of your fellows, or by some base compliance with the base humours or habits of those who employ you, or by adopting some dishonest trick of the market, or by in some way staining your integrity, defiling the clear honour of your soul, and so violating the allegiance you owe to your principles, your conscience, your God.

On the other hand, you may preserve your integrity untouched; but, while you do nothing that men call mean and base, you may suffer mere success in business to absorb all your energies; you may come to regard it as "the chief good and market of your time:" you may pursue it with an ardour which will compel you to neglect, not only the culture of your mind and the best and purest affections of the heart and home, but also your public duties as a citizen, the worship of the Church, the service of Him to whom you owe all you have, and to whom alone you can look for comfort in your griefs, for support in death, for life and peace beyond the grave.

In either case, if you yield to these temptations, you will have turned what was once a clear duty, a duty which you owed to God and man, into an idol, into a Calf such as that which of old men worshipped in Samaria. And your Calf will kick you,

as it kicked them. Your want of integrity, your meanness and baseness, will be detected and exposed; or, worse still, they will *not* be detected and exposed, and you will grow up into a sleek, prosperous, self-satisfied man of business, without a thought in your mind worth having, cherishing no pure and large affection in your heart, with no love for books, art, nature, despised or pitied by your neighbours, whom you have done nothing to serve, in the very proportion in which they are wise and good: with no solace in your griefs—for what balm is there in gold for a wounded heart? and with no hope in death—for at death you must leave all you have really loved. Your punishment will have grown out of your sin, your misery out of your worship.

With most of you young women, the main preoccupation is, I suppose, *love*, with all the sacred duties and hopes it inspires. And there is nothing to blush for in that. It is the chief vocation given you by God. But, remember, that even love itself, however pure and strong, must not override duty—the duty you owe to yourselves, to your parents, even to the man you love, and, above all, to God. Even love, if it be made an idol, will prove to be but a Calf. And if, in the sacred name of Love, you cast away prudence, principle, parental control, and marry a man who has not yet learned to earn his own livelihood, or whose character is dubious, or whose principles are not good, or whose life is bad,

or who seeks to detach you from all the affections and relationships which made life dear to you until you met him, you have only to look at a thousand sordid, loveless, and godless homes to see how *your* Calf will kick you for your pains.

Finally, let me remind you of the point from which we started: that all these foolish and hurtful idolatries of ours spring from our false conceptions of God, and of what He requires of us. The greedy boy thinks to be happy if only he can fill his greedy mouth; and the vain foolish girl thinks she shall have nothing left to desire if she can only indulge her self-conceit. But they could not possibly think so if they knew that God is really ruling their life, and understood what his plan for them is, and what is the end He would have them pursue. And if *they* knew God aright, neither could the lad just launched in business assume that succes in business is to be obtained by doubtful means, or that it could possibly satisfy him if it were attained; nor could the maiden dream that by following the bent of a strong affection in the teeth of duty she could enter on a happy life. The true ends of life, the highest ends, do not lie here—in mere worldly success, or even in gratified affection. A man may live and die poor, a woman may live and die alone, and yet may have both found and enjoyed the chief good of human life, may yet have reached and rested in its true end.

How, then, are we so to think of God as to discover what He would have us do and become, as

to learn what our true end is? We need not go beyond the pages of Hosea for an answer to that question.

He teaches us to think of God as a wise and loving Father who is ever seeking to make us good. He compares the great Jehovah, so awful to the Jewish mind, to a father teaching his child to walk (Hosea xi. 1–4). The father, he says, places himself at a distance from his child, what to the child may seem an immeasurable distance, that his child may learn to "go," may try to come to him. Yet, all the while, the distance is only apparent, not real. The father has never left him. "His arm is stretched out through the intervening space to support the steps of the child, to further his effort, to cover his failure," to save him from any serious fall. And what is the end for which this tender Divine training is vouchsafed us? Not that we may indulge our appetites, not that we may pamper our vanity; not that we may grow rich and win success, not even that we may gratify our affections: but that we may so develope our strength and use our powers as to be able to walk with our Father; that we may grow like Him, that we may share his wisdom, his purity, his goodness; that we may become of one will with Him, and work for the very ends for which He works: in a word, that we may become *perfect* as our Father in heaven is perfect.

Now if you think of God as your Father, and believe, therefore, the true aim and end of your life

to be that you should become good, and that He is always seeking to make you good—in this clear light from Heaven you may see at once how poor and paltry are many of the aims which both children and men pursue, and how inevitable it is that they should be frustrated of these poor aims in order that they may learn to set the true end of life before them. In other words, you see how necessary, and how merciful, it is that, when we put these foolish sordid Calves of ours into the seat and place of God, that they should be made to kick us, or to kick us off, and so teach us where our true rest and our true peace are to be found. You see, even, that the well-deserved falls and failures of ours which result from our pursuit of false aims, our worship of false gods, are parts of the process by which our heavenly Father is teaching us to walk, and to walk with Him.

You are touched and moved to the heart when you read or hear that Sir Walter Scott, as he lay a-dying, called Lockhart, his somewhat grim and bitter son-in-law to his bedside, and kissing him on both cheeks, sighed with his last breath, "Be good, my dear, be good!" How, then, can you fail to be still more deeply touched and moved when you learn that that is what Almighty God, the great Father in heaven, is always saying to each one of you, "Be good, my dear, be good!" and that He never says it with a more tender and inviting voice than when you lie bruised and wounded in the dust,

cast off, abandoned, brought to shame by some miserable Calf which you have worshipped and served, instead of Him.

God grant that you may all listen, and listen early, to his kind voice; and arise and walk with Him.

XII.

WHAT IS THAT IN THY HAND?

"And the Lord said unto him, What is that in thine hand? And he said, A rod."—EXODUS iv. 2.

UST as the most saintly of men have often accounted themselves the chief of sinners, so many of the greatest of men have thought most humbly of themselves. We may be quite sure that there was no man then on earth so competent, by natural gifts and training, as Moses for the work of redeeming Israel from the bondage of Egypt, and raising a horde of feeble and ignorant slaves into a united and well-ordered nation, or God would not have chosen and called him to do it. Yet when the call comes to him, his only thought is how he may decline it. "I am too obscure and unknown," he pleads: "I am too ignorant and infirm: I am not eloquent; speech comes stubbornly to my slow tongue." In his own judgment, this great man

possessed no single element of greatness; and he who achieved the hardest task ever allotted to man felt that task to be wholly beyond his powers.

In short, when the Master of the House called him to his service, Moses, like the men in the Parable, began to make excuse; and so resolutely did he persist in excusing himself that, we are told, "*the anger* of the Lord was kindled against him."

But if God was angry with him for his humility, I cannot but think that He was pleased with him for it too. For even we, though we admit that Moses was *too* fertile in objections and pushed them too far, love him the more, and think the better of him, for the modesty which prompted him to account himself unworthy of a task for which we, nevertheless, know that no man was so fit as he. We have learned that true greatness is always humble, and that the greater a man is the more likely he is to under-value and distrust himself. We have learned that a man who is content with himself is much too easily contented; and that he who is satisfied with what he has done, has done little to purpose. And do you suppose that God did not know what we have learned? that *He* did not see what we see so plainly, and did not understand that the humility of Moses was part of his greatness, and proved him to be fit for great enterprises?

Angry with him! Yes, God was angry with him as a father may be angry with a shy diffident lad of

promise—angry enough to drive him to the task from which he shrank, yet loving him all the more for the meek and lowly spirit which made him shrink from it. For has not God Himself told us that it is on that man He looks, and with him He dwells, who is of a humble spirit and who trembles at his word? And was not Moses of a humble spirit? Did not *he* tremble at the word which called him to a task so honourable and yet so hard?

When we meet him in my text, Moses was making his third excuse. He had already urged that he was too obscure and unknown for the task assigned him; and that he was too ignorant. He now pleads that he is too powerless, of an insufficient capacity and force. What can *he* do either to compel Pharaoh to let the Israelites go, or to pursuade the Israelites to follow him? What means or resources has he, a simple shepherd, at his command, with which to confront the irresponsible despot of the mightiest empire in the world, or to quicken courage and hope in the hearts of a feeble and enslaved race?

It is in reply to this reasonable but despondent question that God demands, "What is that in thine hand?" and receives the reply "A rod." *A rod!* Yes, so at least our English Version makes Moses say. But what he really said was, "A *staff*"—such a staff, or crook, as every shepherd then carried with him. And what he really meant was, I suppose: "Am I to go forth against the vast military array

of Egypt with nothing but a shepherd's staff in my hand? and can I expect that the Israelites will follow me, whom they know not, as the silly sheep follow the shepherd whose voice they know?"

The answer to that doubtful inquiry is a very singular one, and is rich in hopeful suggestions. "Cast that staff, which you so much despise, on the ground," says God. And, lo! when Moses obeys, the staff turns into a serpent, and the serpent attacks the Shepherd, and Moses has to flee from before it; for what can a poor shepherd do when his very staff turns to be his foe? "Seize the serpent by the tail," cries God to the fugitive Shepherd. And when he obeys, the serpent stiffens back into a staff capable of destroying many serpents.

There may be parable here as well as miracle. This strange transformation may have been intended to teach both Moses, and us, that when men refuse to employ their faculties and gifts in God's service, their gifts and faculties turn upon them and bite and devour them; while, if they use them as He bids, they reveal unsuspected powers and rise to a force which nothing can resist. But one thing is quite certain, quite clear; *viz.* that when we attempt any task to which we are called by God, He will teach us so to use the means at our command—however slender they may be, and however humbly we may think of them—and He will endue them with such a sovereign force, that they will prove sufficient for all our needs. Moses thought there was nothing in

his staff to help him in any task beyond that of keeping sheep. God shewed him that there was *much* in it—enough to shake the whole power of Egypt—for it was by this very staff that he wrought the signs which broke the pride of Pharaoh; and that, with nothing but this staff in his hand, he might guide and rule the Children of Israel like a flock.

There was, then, a wonderful lesson in this staff *for Moses*. Has it no lesson *for you*, my dear children? If any of you have been thinking, "What has all this story about Moses to do with us?" I reply that it has much to do with you. For I am coming to you with the very question with which God came to Moses: and how should you understand what the question means for you, unless you understand what it meant for him? By this time I hope you do understand what it meant for him; and, if you do, it will not take long to shew you what it means for you.

Well, now, I will come to you little ones first—come to you not simply as you sit there listening to what I am saying, but as you go about in your daily life. I come, and I ask: "What is that in thine hand?" Perhaps, as you look up, you laugh and say: "A needle, Sir, and I am learning to sew;" or, "A book, and I am learning to read;" or, "A pen, and I am learning to write:" and then you all ask together: "But is there anything very wonderful in that?"

Then I come to you elder children with the same question, "What is that in thine hand?" and you give me the same answer with a difference. *You* say: "A needle, and I am making something to wear, or something that will be useful in the house, or something by which I may earn a little money." Or you say: "A book, and I am trying to learn a language, or to master the rudiments of a science, or to acquaint myself with some masterpiece of literature." Or you say: "A pen, and I am writing letters, or I am keeping accounts, for the firm which employs me." And then, as you notice a certain significance or expectation in my tone or face, you all add: "But what is there wonderful in what we are doing? All the lads and lasses we know are doing very much the same."

Of course, I might have found you with other things in your hands: with a doll, for example, or a cricket-bat, or with a broom, a brush, or a hammer, a saw, a spade. But I take as few answers as I can, that my sermon may be the shorter: and I suppose I could have hardly hit on any articles more likely to be in your hands than these three—a needle, a pen, a book. Let us keep to these three, then, and see what we can make of them, and whether *they* are at all likely to behave themselves like Moses' staff—to be as helpful to you in the great task of life, if you use them aright, and as dangerous, if you refuse to use them as you ought.

Now that it is hard both to use them well, and to

learn to use them at all, no one of you will deny. For you little ones often find it very hard to learn to sew, to read, to write, and waste a good many foolish tears over these difficult tasks. And you elder ones, no doubt, have often to sew, to keep to your books, to use your pen, *i.e.* to work, to study, to post ledgers and keep accounts, when you would very gladly break away to more welcome occupations, or to still more welcome amusements. But, hard as it is to learn to use them, and to go on using them steadily and skilfully, you know very well that even these small instruments—even the needle, the book, the pen—which are as familiar to you as his staff was to Moses, may become, in a modest way, true rods of power in your hands. For many a lady is now earning her bread, or making a welcome addition to it, by her needle, by the useful or beautiful work she can do with it, who little thought how well it would serve her when she first learned to wield it. And many a man is earning a livelihood by writing letters or keeping accounts who did not foresee what his pen would do for him when he first took copybook and arithmetic in hand. While many, both men and women, are doing profitable and honourable work in the world in virtue of a knowledge they have gained from books, and from thinking over what books teach, who did not so much as dream what books would do for them when they learned to read. And most of *you* will have to get much of your occupation, and much of your

pleasure, by and bye from these small tools. Your livelihood will in great measure depend on your deftness and diligence in using them. You will draw culture from them and the best kind of amusement. You may even gain influence by them, and a certain reputation and power. And that should be a great encouragement, a strong incentive to you, to learn how to use them, and to practise yourselves in the use of them as cleverly as you can.

But though to learn to sew, to read, to write and cipher, be a hard task, and though to go on practising with these simple tools with diligence and skill is often a still harder task, I have not yet touched on the hardest task to which you are called, and to which we are all called. For, whatsoever else we may do, or may not do, there is one task which we all *must* do, since we are called to it by God Himself. And this task, as you know, is so to rule our tempers, cravings, passions, affections, and so to use our capacities and opportunities and gifts, as that we may cast out all which is evil from our nature, and cherish all which is good; as that we may become unselfish and unworldly, pure in thought and pure in heart, truthful, upright, loving, kind. Our great task, our *high* calling and vocation, is so to rule ourselves and so to carry ourselves in every condition in which it may please God to place us as that we may become good men and good women—good after the pattern of our Lord Jesus Christ. And is not *that* a hard task, a task hard enough for

even the most adventurous and aspiring of you? Only try it, and you will soon find out how hard it is.

Nay, most of you, I hope and believe, *have* tried it, and have already found out how hard it is—too hard for you to achieve alone. For this is a task from which you are never to lift your hand, whatever other tasks you are doing, whether you are at work or at play. Always, wherever you are, and whatever you are doing, there is some evil temper to be subdued, some good affection to be cherished, some craving to be kept within bounds, some temptation to be withstood, some unselfish and kindly act to be done, some truth or some bearing of truth on conduct to be discovered, some difficult duty to be discharged, some ideal to be pursued. And, hence, there is *a Christian* way both of sewing and of learning to sew, both of reading and of learning to read, both of writing and of learning to write.

If, while you are learning these arts, while you are still at school, you are impatient, sulky, wilful, obstinate; or if you learn only because you *must*, and do as little as you can without being punished for your laziness; or if you learn only because you want to beat your companions, or from a selfish desire to get on and to get up in your little world: why, then, though you may get through your school tasks fairly enough, you are not doing the great task of your life, but undoing it; you are not becoming better, but worse. On the other hand, if you are

diligent, obliging, obedient, out of respect to your teachers, or from love to your parents, or from reverence for God and his law, or because you want to fit yourselves for usefulness in after life; if, therefore, you will not play when you ought to be at work, and *will* now and then turn from your own task to help a school-mate with his or hers; if you are forward to protect the weak, and pity the ignorant, and help the backward, and are almost as well pleased to see others do well and get on as you are to get on yourselves: in that case, you are doing the great work to which God has called you as well as making way with your school duties and tasks. If He were to come to you, and to ask, "What is that in thine hand?" and you could look up and say honestly: "A needle, Lord, or a pen, or a book, and I am doing the best I can with it, the best for myself, and the best for others," you may be sure, that God Himself would be pleased with you, and say: "Well done, my child; you are faithful in little things, and you are qualifying yourself for greater things than these."

By this dutifulness and diligence, too, you would be pleasing men as well as God, giving them kind thoughts of you, teaching them to see worth and promise in you, disposing them to assist and advance you. I do not say that, even with the goodwill of men and the blessing of God, you are sure to rise to high station, or great wealth, or commanding influence—for many such a rise is

really a fall; but I do say that you will be discharging the chief task of human life and getting the real good of it; and that you are fitting yourselves for usefulness, and the best sort of distinction, both in this world and in that which is to come. Men will trust you and love you; and so also will God. And what wealth, what honour, can compare with this,—that God Himself should love you, that God Himself should trust you?

So, again, when you leave School for Home, or to go out into the world, if you are still diligent and dutiful, if your great aim is to become good and to do good, to cultivate what is best in yourselves and to serve your neighbours, even a needle, a book, a pen, will become great powers in your hands. *You* will not need looking after and watching. You will not need to be bribed or coerced into a faithful discharge of household or business duties. You will not neglect them when no eye is upon you but that of God; for it is his eye that you fear most. You will not be indolent and self-pleasing, or sacrifice the interests of others to your own. There is no fear that *you* will do as little work as you can, and scamp it or hurry through it in order that you may rush off to pursuits or pleasures more to your mind. And there is still less fear that you will be untruthful, mutinous, dishonest; for you do all you do as unto the Lord, and not unto men. You *prize* opportunities of service. You are bent on cultivating your best faculties and gifts, and thus pre-

paring yourselves for more extended usefulness. There may not be much in your hand, or it may not seem much; but you will make the best use of it; and the less there is the more you will try to do your best with it, and so to make it more. And you too will find that to him that hath, and makes the best use of what he hath, more is given. You will win the respect and confidence of men; and if *men* fail to mark and to reward your honest endeavours, be you very sure that *God* will not fail to mark them, and to reward them with power to do more and better things for Him and for your fellows. And is not the approval of God sweeter, more truly enriching, and an infinitely higher distinction, than the goodwill and applause of men?

Finally, there is but one other point which I wish to impress upon you. If we are not like Moses in his greatness, as of course we are not; if our capacities are not so large nor our opportunities so great as his, we are very like him in his underestimate of the value and the power of little things. When in reply to God's question, "What is that in thine hand?" he said, "A staff," I am afraid he meant: "*Nothing but* a staff; and what can I do with that?"

And, in like manner, if I were to come to you and ask the same question, and you were to reply, "A needle," "A pen," "A book," I am afraid that what you would mean would be, "*Nothing but* a needle," "*Nothing but* a pen," "*Nothing but* a book:

and what is there in this to fit me for the great work of life?"

Well, I have tried to shew you how much there is in any one of these small tools; and how much you may do with it, if you use it in a Christian way. And all I have to do now is to remind you that with the staff, of which Moses thought so poorly, he smote down the pride of Pharaoh, and redeemed a whole race from captivity; and to warn you against falling into his mistake.

It is a very common mistake, especially among young people; for they, of course, are much more likely to misapprehend the comparative value of things than those who have had a larger experience of what men can do, with their several gifts, in their several vocations. Many of *you*, I dare say, have already had your dreams and wishes, and have thought you could have done more and better had it pleased God to confer more shining gifts upon you, or to place you in happier conditions, or to open up to you larger opportunities of shewing what is in you: and so you have fallen into the very mistake into which Moses fell.

For example, I have known girls who a little disliked and grudged having to stay at home, to nurse or teach their little brothers and sisters, or to make themselves generally useful in the house, who yet have thought that the height of their ambition would have been reached could they only have gone out as governesses, or as hospital nurses—had they

been called, that is, to do as much and more *for strangers* than they did at home for those whom they loved best! Was not that a strange ambition, a strange mistake? Take care, then, girls, that none of you fall into it. Be thankful that you are allowed to do for your kith and kin what others have to do for people they have never seen before. Settle it in your minds, once for all, that no vocation can be more honourable than a call to usefulness *at home*, that none brings a finer training and discipline with it, or a sweeter reward.

I have know lads, too, who were very impatient of a narrow sphere, which yet they did not fill over well, and who had not learned the open secret, that the surest way of rising out of narrow conditions is to outgrow them, to get too big for them to hold, to make themselves so useful that they *must* be promoted to better work. "I have nothing but a pen," says one; "and I am set to post ledgers with it and to make out bills. If only I might write a book with it!" Now, God forbid that I, who have written so many books, should say that the ambition to write a good and useful book is not a noble, or at least a worthy, ambition. But have you considered how much it would cost you to write such a book—cost you in training, in toil of thought, in experience and emotion; and how little pay you would get for it when all was done? You may be paid better where you are. You may be more useful where you are if you do your work well, and are winning the respect and

confidence of all about you. And, in any case, you may be doing the chief work of life even as you sit at your desk; *i.e.* you may be cultivating all that is best in your nature by serving God and man: and thus you *may* be preparing yourself to write a good book some day, even while you are doing something much better and greater than that, *viz.* living a good life.

What I should like you all to do, what I would fain hope my words may help you to do, is to make the very best use of the gifts and opportunities you have, and so to turn your "staff" into a rod of power, instead of turning it into a serpent that will bite you, by despising your opportunities and neglecting your gifts. With nothing more in your hands than a needle, a book, a pen, you may still love and serve God with all your heart; you may still love and serve your neighbour as yourselves: and if you do that, you will be filling the highest vocation and discharging the chief duty of man.

XIII.

CRYING CHILDREN.

"Children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the son of David."—MATTHEW xxi. 15.

ONLY a few weeks ago I was introduced to a little grandniece of mine—a pretty child of three or four years of age, with very large, solemn, wistful eyes. She came up to me, hugging in her arms a doll half as big as herself, and the first words she spoke to me were: "This is my doll, uncle!" "I hope she is a good child," I said, "and don't give you much trouble." "O, yes," she replied, "Dolly's very good; *she never cwies.*" And, of course, I could only tell the little woman how glad I was she knew that it was not "good" to cry, and express a hope that she never cried herself. Which, indeed, I found she hardly ever did. More than once in our romps together she hurt herself, hurt herself once very much; but she only plumped down on the carpet

and made a wry face, never opening her lips till she could speak without crying. I confess I was astonished at her courage, and even began to doubt whether self-control pushed so far as that might not do her harm. But, of course, we all told her that it was very good, and very brave, of her not to cry when she was hurt.

We, old people, always do take that tone with children, as you, children, know very well. When you little ones squall and bawl, and sob and weep, and knead your tears with your knuckles as if you were making bread, we say: "Don't cry; be a good child, and don't cry," till I dare say you are as tired of hearing us as we are of hearing you. What will you think of me, then, I wonder, if for once, instead of saying "Don't cry," I tell you of some children whom we all like and admire simply because they did cry, and cry in the Temple, or, as we should say, cry in Church?

Whatever you may think, I hope you will not follow their example to-night; for if you should begin to sob and squall, how should I get through my sermon? I might as well sit down at once and hold my tongue. Whatever you think, I hope that none of you will suppose that we should like and admire you were you to shriek and howl every time you bruise a finger, or bump your head, or are told to go to bed. We should *dis*like and *dis*approve of you if you did that.

Nor is it for any nonsense of *that* kind that we like

and admire, that even our Lord Jesus Himself loved and admired, the children whom He heard crying in the temple. For they were not "crying" at all, in our sense of the word. They were not weeping and sobbing, but shouting—shouting for joy! They had just seen, O such wonderful things! They had seen the sordid cheating Levites who sold doves for sacrifices, and changed foreign money into the sacred shekels of the temple, driven out from the temple which they profaned and disgraced, by a young Prophet with a face so pure and awful in its righteous indignation that no man was able to resist Him; no, not even the money-changers and money-makers who thought only of their gains, and who, in their greed for gain, had turned the House of Prayer into a den of thieves. And, more wonderful still, they had seen that pure and awful face all suffused with pity and compassion, as the young Prophet turned to look on the blind and crippled beggars who haunted the temple gates and courts, asking alms of those who passed by: and they had heard Him speak words by which some of these poor sufferers were healed.

Think of it! They had actually seen men who had been blind from their birth open their wondering eyes for the first time upon the light, and men, lame from the womb, walk and leap, and go dancing round their Deliverer as though they felt that their limbs must be put to the test before they could be sure that they were their own, as though they could never

thank Him enough for the strange and marvellous gift He had conferred upon them. If *you* had been there, and had seen these wonders for yourselves, if you had looked on the dancing shouting crowd which followed Jesus up and down, and made the temple cloisters ring with their praises and thanksgivings, would not you have been tempted to shout and dance too? Could you have refrained from joining in their song of praise?

Well, there were children such as you in the temple, who *saw* the wonderful scenes of which you only read; and, *in them*, the ready sympathy of childhood was so touched and moved that they came running about Jesus, the young Prophet from Galilee, and cried, or cried out, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" taking up I dare say the very words that fell from the lips of the blind and the lame whom He had healed, or of the crowd which gathered round them.

Who were these children? One or two of our best scholars, observing that they are spoken of as "*the* children in the temple," and not simply as any children, and that their shout took the form of a song, suppose that these crying, or chanting, children were the little chorister boys who sang the psalms in the temple every day. But I am not sure of that, though it is a very pretty thought. For I have observed that *all* children, when they join in a shout, and repeat it often, fall into a kind of song or chant. They need not be choristers to do that. At this season of the year, for example,

I often see a small mob of small street boys, who certainly are not choristers, run by my house, with their jackets or caps in their hands, trying to catch the poor butterflies: and these boys, I notice, always sing as they run, and sing the same song. Perhaps some of you know the song. The words of it run, so far as I can make out their broad provincial pronunciation:

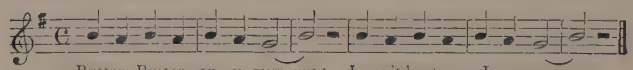
Būtter, Būtter, any mur-ure— .
I won't hurt you, I am sur-ure,

all the u's pronounced very hard, and the last word drawled out very long, and set to a quaint rising jerk or interval, which I dare say has been familiar to the ears of many generations.[1]

I can quite believe, then, that not only choristers, but any children who were in the temple at Jerusalem when Jesus wrought his miracles of healing, if they began to cry out "Hosanna to the Son of David!" would soon slip into a rude chant, since all deep emotion easily rises into song, and would pipe it out with immense pleasure—at least to themselves. To shout and sing is a natural relief to the excited and overcharged heart.

But we must look into *the words* of the song they sang if I am to shew you why I think these children

[1] Thus it goes, so far as I can make it out:—



crying in the temple are worthy of your imitation, and why we should all be glad to hear you crying in the same strain.

Some of you would be very much surprised to hear, no doubt, that you all know a little Hebrew. Yet even the youngest of you have learned to say, or sing, *Hallelujah* and *Hosanna*, and these are both Hebrew words. Perhaps, however, you do not always remember their meaning when you use them. But most of you must know that "Halleluja" means "Praise to the Lord," and that "Hosanna" is, as a quaint old scholar says, "a kind of holy *Hurrah*." In itself "Hosanna," as a prayer, means "Save, we beseech Thee," and, as an exclamation, "O, save!" But just as we ourselves, when we feel very patriotic, sing "God save the Queen," without thinking much about the Queen herself, and not always remembering that we are praying to the Almighty; just as the French salute any famous conqueror, or statesman, or popular favourite, with "*Vive!*" and the Italians shout out their "*Vivas*," not pausing to think that they are invoking *life* on the man whom they delight to honour; so the Jews came to use the word *Hosanna* simply as an exclamation of joy and wonder and thankfulness. I dare say they did not remember once in a hundred times that they were asking God to save them, or to save those whom they saluted with their *hosannas*, any more than we remember once in a hundred times that, when we say "Good-bye" to a friend,

we are really praying "God be with you." Some of you may have said "Good-bye" ever since you had friends to part from without so much as knowing what the word really meant.

In their common usage, then, *Hosanna* meant little more to the Jews than *Hurrah* does to us. But "Hosanna *to the Son of David*" meant a good deal more than this. *This* was a Messianic formula; *i.e.* it was the form of words with which they hailed one whom they took to be the Messiah, the Saviour, promised to their fathers. Or, rather, it was an abbreviation, a contraction of that formula. The full form ran: "*Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed be He that cometh in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!*" And, no doubt, this was the full song of the children who cried in the temple, though only a part of it is recorded. On *their* lips, as on that of their fathers, it meant: "This is the long-expected Messiah. Hurrah to Him! The blessing of God be upon Him—all the richest blessings of Heaven. May the work of God prosper in his hand. We accept, we salute, we welcome, we rejoice in Him. Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah!"

The surly Pharisees might deny his claim, and frown on their joy. The wise Rabbis might doubt, and "hesitate dislike." But the children, with their simple unsophisticated instincts, their open minds, their responsive hearts—the children, and all child-like men, had no doubt. *They* did not hesitate for a moment. They were quite sure that no man could

have wrought the marvels which Jesus did unless God were with Him, unless He was the very Saviour whom God had promised to send. He who could give eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame, who could illuminate the minds of men and quicken them to the life of righteousness and peace, must be the Saviour whom they needed, and for whose advent they and their fathers had waited so long. Should they not welcome Him now that He had come? Should they not bless Him for coming, and bless God for sending Him. The great clock of Time had struck a new note, a new hour. The history of man had taken a new turn. The past had waited for Jesus the Christ. The future would be moulded by Him. Salvation had come to the world, and joy. Should they not greet Him with their hosannas, and *lose* themselves in the joy and wonder of so great a moment?

And the children were right after all,—not the wise Rabbis, nor the surly frowning Pharisees, as we know very well now. Time has justified them, and the history of mankind. Jesus *was* the Saviour. It was but meet that they should make merry and be glad over a world that had been lost but was found, that had been dead but was alive again.

Nay, the children are *always* right, so long as they keep the childlike heart. Or why are we taught that out of the mouth of babes and sucklings God builds a stronghold for weary men? Why did Jesus Himself declare that the things of his kingdom, hidden from the wise and prudent, are revealed to babes;

and that only as we become like a little child can we enter the kingdom of heaven? Why did the great Apostle affirm that not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble, are called, but those whom the world despises as weak and silly?

Some of you elder lads and lasses have been often puzzled, I dare say, by such sayings as these. You have wondered that such a wise book as The Bible should everywhere promise so much to the childlike, to poor and humble, meek and lowly spirits; while it passes by the wise and prudent, *i.e.* the learned and the politic, the mighty and the rich, or even speaks of them with a certain fierceness and contempt, as if their great gifts stood in their way. But I don't think you will wonder any more if you remember, that the wise and learned are few, while the ignorant and unwise are many; that only a small number of us can hope to be reckoned among the noble and the mighty, while we may all cherish a lowly and receptive spirit: and that we should expect an universal faith, like that of Jesus, to address its promises and rewards to the many, rather than to the few. I don't think these sayings will puzzle you much if you observe that the learned, the mighty, the rich, are apt to be content with themselves and with what they have got; to pride themselves on that which raises them above us, and to look with distrust on the spiritual instincts and cravings which they share with us, and by which men are led to accept the salvation of God.

For, after all, the simplest things of life, the most common, are the best. What is learning, or power, or wealth, as compared with honesty, fidelity, love? And what would life be worth but for the moral qualities, the sacred charities and affections, which are open to us all, by which we are bound together, and, if we are true to them, are also drawn to God? That these *are* the best things, those who are most truly wise are the first to acknowledge. It is but a little while since one of the sagest and most learned spirits of our time—John Richard Green, the historian—passed away from us, dying of overwork in a foreign land. Only just before he died he wrote a letter in which he said: "What seems to grow fairer to me as life goes by is the love, and grace, and tenderness of it—not its wit, and cleverness, and grandeur, and knowledge, grand as knowledge is: but just *the laughter of little children, and the friendship of friends, and the cosy talk by the fireside, and the sight of flowers, and the sound of music.*"

Even the wise themselves admit, then, that a childlike spirit, which takes delight in lowly common things, is better than wisdom, or learning, or grandeur; that love, and grace, and tenderness are more to be desired than wit, and cleverness, and knowledge. And to what *should* the Lord Jesus appeal, if not to that which is best in us? To what should He promise his love and benediction if not to that in us which makes us really good and happy?

This, my dear children, is why we want you to be really childlike, and to carry a childlike spirit into manhood and womanhood. This is why we want you, while you are still children, and while your spiritual instincts are still simple and true, to give yourselves to the Lord and Lover of little children, to consider the claim God your Father has upon you, to trust in his love, to devote yourselves to his service.

You have all heard of children who are *not* children: as, for example, the sordid boy who wouldn't play with his marbles *lest he should wear them out;* or the selfish boy who, when his father promised him a pony, said, No, he didn't want a pony, because, if he had one, some other fellow would be sure to want a ride on it; or even the rash impatient boy who jumped into the river to get out of the rain. You feel at once that such boys as these were not boy-like. You know, without being told, when a child is not childlike—that it is not childlike to be undutiful, ungenerous, cold, selfish. You feel that a child ought to be pure, simple, docile, loving, frank, stirred by every brave, noble, or kindly deed, responsive to every touch of generosity and affection.

And if you have what you yourselves know to be a really childlike spirit, a spirit sensitive to the touch of every pure and high emotion, then we who speak to you of Christ can make our appeal to you without fear. We are quite sure that, as soon as in any measure you see Him as He is, you will greet

Him with your Hosannas, because you will feel that He is the very Saviour who meets all your needs, and in whom you can delight. For no man was ever of so childlike a spirit, no man ever shewed so much "love, and grace, and tenderness," as He who claims all children, and all men, for Himself. We cannot take you into the temple, indeed, and let you see Him heal the blind and the lame. But we can tell you the story of his life; we can shew you how pure He was, how good, how kind, how utterly generous and unselfish, how graciously and tenderly He gave Himself up for us all. And we are sure that, as you listen, all that is really childlike in you will go out to meet Him and to rejoice in Him.

All I have to ask of you to-night is, then, that you will yield to the promptings of your own best instincts and affections; and that you will therefore frankly accept Him for your Saviour and Lord, and honestly try to do his will. It will be far harder for you to begin to do so by and bye, when the world has got hold of you and done its worst to make you hard and selfish and greedy, when your instincts will not be so fresh and simple and true as they are now. *Then*, nothing short of a miracle of grace will enable you to overcome the world, and to keep a pure, loving, and childlike heart amid all its temptations. And, therefore, we beg you to accept his grace, to receive and cherish the mind which was in Him *now;* that so the world may not be able to enslave or harm you, nor those who love you have

to mourn because you have not fulfilled the fair promise of your youth.

By the grace of Christ, by the mercies of God, by the love you owe to father and mother, teacher and friend; as you value health, life, peace, we beseech you to carry a meek and lowly, a pure and loving, —in one word, a *childlike*—spirit into the changes, toils, and dangers, that lie before you: for thus you will prepare yourselves to sing in the heavenly, as well as in the earthly, temple: "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed be He that cometh in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"

XIV.

EARS AND NO-EARS: EYES AND NO-EYES.

"The hearing ear, and the seeing eye,
The Lord hath made even both of them."
PROVERBS xx. 12.

MEN of letters are our recognized, and often our best, teachers; for it takes a great man to write a great book: and Solomon was a man of letters who has left more than one great work behind him which the world still reads and admires. Men of science, again, have much to teach us; for they have devoted their lives to the study of the facts of nature and humanity, and to the laws by which they are governed: and Solomon was a very eminent man of science; for "he spake of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth from the wall; he spake also of beasts, and of birds, and of creeping things, and of fishes." Poets are, confessedly, teachers of the

very highest rank; for that which makes a man a poet is his keener insight into the facts of nature and the truths of life, and a heart more deeply and musically stirred as he contemplates them: and Solomon was both a great and a voluminous poet; "his songs," we are told, "were a thousand and five." Nay, more: Solomon was moved, taught, inspired by God, the Fountain of all wisdom—so moved that his fame went out into all the earth, and to this day his name remains a synonym for wisdom in all Eastern lands: "*God* gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart even as the sand that is on the sea shore; and Solomon's wisdom excelled all the wisdom of all the children of the East, and all the wisdom of Egypt; for he was wiser than all men, . . . and his fame was in all the nations round about."

He has many claims on our reverence, then. A man of letters, a man of science, a poet, an inspired sage or prophet, he combines in himself nearly all the claims to which we are wont to defer. His words carry weight. They *command* respect. We cannot put them on one side as if they had been uttered by such an one as ourselves. The whole world confesses his wisdom. And wisdom confers authority. We cannot but listen to the man who knows.

1. Now as you grow up you will all hear, some of you have heard already, that there are wise men in

the world—men of letters, men of science, poets even—who will not admit that it was *God* who made the seeing eye, or the hearing ear, or indeed anything else; who will rather assume that the ear and the eye made themselves by a gradual process of development. They admit, they take it for granted, that there is an intelligible order in the world and in human life, or they would not study them and try to find out what that order is: but they deny that this intelligible order implies an orderly Intelligence at work upon and around us, evolving harmony from confusion. And you may not be able to answer their arguments, or to withstand the authority with which they speak.

In such a case, my text may have an inexpressible value for you. When you read sceptical books and are puzzled by their arguments, you may be tempted to say: "The men who wrote these books are wiser than I am. Must I not defer to them?" And, of course, you *must* defer to them. You must acknowledge that they are more learned and wise than you are, and listen to their words with respect. But if you can quote against them the words of a man who was as much wiser than they as they are wiser than you—how then? In that case, clearly, you must defer to a still higher authority. And Solomon *was* far wiser than they are, so much wiser that all the world would laugh were we to compare the claim to wisdom of any living man of letters or any modern professor of science with that of Solomon. His

fame for wisdom stands far higher than theirs, and will long outlive theirs. And *he* tells us that it was God who made, not the eye only and the ear, but all things that are. The vast majority of the wisest and best men of every age concur with him. They too have believed in God as the Maker of heaven and of earth, with all that they contain. And till you are wise enough to go into these difficult questions for yourselves, it will behove you not to be overborne by the authority of this man or that, but to rest in the conclusion affirmed by the wisest men the world has seen. It will be long before you meet with a greater book than the Bible, or a wiser man than Solomon. And, until you do, it will be your wisdom to listen to them, to trust them. So long, in short, as you are young and unschooled, and must rest on some authority, it is your plain duty to defer only to the highest authority of all.

2. But now that I have drawn this piece of advice from Solomon's words for the benefit of you elder lads and girls, let us look at them again, and see if we cannot find something in them suitable to the younger, and even to the youngest, among you.

When Solomon the Wise tells us that God made the hearing ear and the seeing eye, do you suppose he meant nothing more than that God made our eyes and our ears? *I* think so wise and observant a man must have meant much more than that. When he spoke of the *hearing* ear, I think he must have meant to remind us that some of us have ears

which do *not* hear: and when he speaks of the *seeing* eye, I think he must have meant to remind us that some of us have eyes and do *not* see. And that is an idea which must be pleasantly familiar to most of you. For I suppose that nearly all of you have read a story called "Eyes and No-Eyes." That story tells, as I dare say you know a great deal better than I do, of two boys, Robert and William, who had taken the very same walk—across the heath, and up the hill, and home through the meadows by the river's side; and while one of these boys had seen nothing, or noticed nothing, the other had seen all manner of curious and beautiful things—the mistletoe growing on the crabtree; the woodpecker running up a trunk, and rapping at every door where an insect lived; the lapwing who lured him away from her nest by pretending to fly with a broken wing; the remains of an old Roman or Danish camp, a water-rat plunging into its hole, a kingfisher shooting past him like a flash of blue light, a heron fishing in the stream: and, in fine, more marvels than I can stay to recount. Both these boys had eyes; but one had the *seeing* eye, and the other had not.

Well, all that this favourite story says and implies about the eye is just as true about the ear. And it would not be difficult to write a story, on the same lines, which might be called "Ears and No-Ears." For most of us are just as inobservant, just as slow to note the sounds we hear and yet do not hear, as we are to mark the sights we see and yet do not see.

If, for instance, you walk across the fields or through a wood, where the birds are singing, how many of you, I wonder, pay any attention to what they say? How many of you are there who can distinguish the songs of even the commonest birds one from another, and say, "That's a thrush, and that a blackbird, and that a linnet, and that a chaffinch!" How many of you understand even the notes of one bird so as to be able to tell when he is angry, when he is alarmed, when he is pleased, when he is courting his mate, and when he is in quest of food for his young? And yet if you had the *hearing* ear, and knew only so much as this, what interest and pleasure it would lend to almost every walk you take!

Or, again, two lads, or two lasses—or perhaps one lad *with* one lass—may go to the same concert and listen to the same music; and one shall be simply bored to death and long for it all to be over, while in the other it quickens memory and imagination, and calls up thoughts and emotions too deep and subtle and sweet to be put into words.

Or, again, two hundred children may join in the same prayer; and yet hardly any two of them shall mean the same thing, though they use the very same words. Or they may listen to the same sermon; and yet it shall not be quite the same to any two among them, though they have listened to the very same words. I am not going to be so rude as to suppose that there is any little *No-ears* here to-night, any boy or girl who will not remember

a single thing I have said, because he did not happen to bring a hearing ear to Church with him. But if by and bye—to-morrow morning, for example—you could all write down what you thought you heard me say to-night, and were to send me in two hundred reports of my sermon, I should soon find out how many of you had a hearing ear, and even to what degree you possessed it. And you may be very sure that, among you, you would cover a very wide scale, and that you would not *all* stand quite at the top of it.

That, indeed, would be a very curious and instructive experiment to try on *any* Congregation. For, in truth, what we hear in any utterance depends on what we bring the power of hearing, just as what we see in any scene depends on what we bring the power of seeing. I, for instance, can remember a time when I absolutely did not see the ferns and wild flowers I passed as I walked in field and copse, unless they were very conspicuous, simply because I had not been taught where and how to look for them, to mark their differences, to take pleasure in their beauty. And I can also remember a time when I did not hear the birds, unless they sang very loud or close, because I did know their respective notes, or understand what they meant. And, of course, even now I do not see or hear half that the naturalist, or the botanist, or the painter, or, above all, the poet, would find in them. They would all tell any one of these men

secrets which they hide from me. Nay, they may even hide *themselves*, so that I altogether fail to see or hear them. For we are all apt to overlook that which is unknown to us; just as we might cross streams rich in gold, and never so much as dream that any gold was there, though the geologist, or the miner, would instantly suspect its presence. What we do not understand, or do not expect, excites no curiosity, touches no interest, rouses no attention; and hence it slips by unseen, unheard—just as the snapping of a slender twig might say nothing to us, and yet might tell a sportsman where the wild creature was which he was trying to hunt down.

In short, if *God* makes the hearing ear and the seeing eye, He expects *us* to make them too. He gives us, not only a wonderful apparatus of lenses in the eye, and a wonderful apparatus of drums in the ear, but the capacity to use, train, and develop them, that we may see the beauty of his works, and master the "distinction in the sounds" both of things with and things without life, as the pipe, or the harp, or the songs of birds, and the still sweeter tongue of man. And He expects us to use and train these wonderful faculties. He rewards us in proportion as we meet, or disappoint, his expectation and our duty. If we are alert, quick to notice, diligent to learn, the world grows full of charm, full of music, for us. If we are dull, slow, and averse to learn, the beauty fades from the

face of the world, and its music is hushed, even if it be not jangled into harsh discord.

Do you see this flower? Take a good look at it. Well, what do you see in it? What does it say to you?

Many of you, I dare say, would hardly call it a flower at all, and think it looks like a poor imitation of a flower cut out in rather dirty white flannel. And yet it is a very rare and distinguished flower. Its name is *edel-weiss;* and *weiss* is German for "white," and *edel* German for "honour." The flower is, therefore, *the white honour*, or the white flower which it is an honour to have plucked or to wear. But why? Simply because it grows in very high places difficult of access, on lofty mountains, or on the edge of steep dangerous precipices. In Switzerland the guides, and the men who have climbed the higher peaks, wear it in their hats, as an honour,—to denote that they have made difficult ascents, and have been where it is dangerous to go. I myself have plucked it on many mountains from five to ten thousand feet high; sometimes in the lofty flower-valleys which are a mere blaze of colour, sometimes in green sloping meadows where it flourishes beside the runnels of living water; sometimes at the foot of glaciers, where great rivers take their rise, plunging in a milk-white torrent out of caves of ice; and sometimes under the very shadow of the Matterhorn, with a hundred miles of mountains well in view. Many pretty, or tragic,

stories are told about young men who, to prove their courage or to please their sweethearts, have plucked it at the risk, or at the cost, of life—almost, or altogether, falling over the edge of the precipice on which it grew. And these stories are written, some in German, and some in French.

Now in my small garden I have this year a finer plant of *edelweiss* than I have ever found on any mountain; and I have brought you one of its seven big blooms to look at. It often reminds me of much which I have seen, or heard, or done in Switzerland. Any summer evening that I care to pause before it, it will stand up in its little bed and paint me a hundred beautiful pictures of mountains and valleys, ice-pinnacles and streams, or tell me a dozen charming stories of romantic adventure. But it would not do so much as that for many of you. Before *you* can see as much in it, and hear as much from it, as I do, you must not only be able to read, you must have read the books I have read; you must know a little French or a little German; you must have travelled and talked with the guides. Only so can you get the seeing eye, and the hearing ear—so far at least as the *edelweiss* is concerned.

And now, I suppose, you begin to see what I am driving at. What I want to impress upon you is, that the School tasks and books and studies, which often seem so dull and irksome to you, are really little doors which open into the great picture-

gallery and concert-chamber of God. The more you know and the more you learn, the more you will see of the beauty and the wonder of the world around you; the more you will hear of that great psalm of praise which it for ever sings to its Maker and Lord. In proportion as you cultivate the seeing eye and the hearing ear, the eye which really sees the things before it and the ear which really distinguishes the tones floating through the air, life will become full of interest, full of charm, full of instruction, for you. While if, through lack of a quick and diligent cultivation of your faculties, you sink into the condition of those who have eyes but see not, and ears but hear not, your life will grow dull and burdensome to you, without charm and without use.

3. But even yet we have not got at all that Solomon means. For when the Bible speaks of deaf men who hear and blind men who see, or when it speaks of men who have eyes but do not see, and ears but do not hear, it almost always refers to their *moral* condition, to their attitude towards truth, righteousness, God, as well as to the use they make of their mental faculties and capacities. It praises them for seeing and hearing as for an act of virtue or piety: it blames them for not seeing and hearing as for a sin. Now, no doubt, Solomon uses the words in the same sense. He would, I am sure, have liked you to know something, to know much, of trees, from the oak that grows in the forest to the

ferns that spring from the wall, and of beasts and birds and fish. He would have liked you to learn all that men of science can teach you of the wonders of their structure and history; all that poets can teach you of their mystery and loveliness, till you too could find in the meanest flower that blows thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears. But even if you had learned all this, I doubt whether he would have adjudged you to have the seeing eye and the hearing ear unless you could also read and obey the handwriting of God on the conscience and the heart; unless you honestly cared to acquaint yourselves with the will of God, that you might do it. Knowledge without love is at once a poor, and a perilous, endowment. To be clever without being good, without even trying to be good, is only to deserve, and to secure, a severer condemnation. To know much of God's works, and to take much delight in them, while yet we know nothing of *Him*, and cannot rest and delight in Him, is simply to shew that, though we have eyes, we cannot see that which is best worth seeing; that, though we have ears, we cannot hear the Voice to which it most behoves us to listen.

Did you ever meet a wise fool? You *will* meet him often enough by and bye. That is to say, there are many men in the world who know much, and can use what they know very sagaciously, men who never doubt that two and two make four, or that every cause must produce its proper effect, who yet do not know that to love and serve God, *i.e.* to do

that which is right and kind, is the only path of peace, and even imagine that they may do wrong and not suffer by and for the wrong they have done. And these are "the fools" of the Bible. For the Bible affirms that it is only the fool who says, "There is no God;" and yet wise men have said it. Must there not be wise fools in the world then, if at least the Bible be true? The Bible declares "the fear of the Lord," *i.e.* a loving reverence for God and for his righteous will, to be both the beginning and the end of true wisdom. How, then, can they be truly wise who say either, "There is no God," or "God does not see; He will not judge"? Shall not He who made the eye see? Must not He who made the ear hear?

Of this, then, you may be sure that, in the judgment of Solomon or of any other writer in the Bible, you have not even begun to be truly wise until you love and reverence God; until, from reverence and love for Him, you set yourselves to know and do that which is right, however hard it may be, and refuse to do that which is wrong, however easy and pleasant it may look. And, in this respect, I think I may assure you that even the judgment of the world is at one with the judgment of God as revealed in his Word. For men also prize goodness more than knowledge or cleverness, and value a kind heart more than even a full and well-trained mind. Be good, then, if you would be wise, if you would prove that you have an eye that sees, and an ear to hear and obey.

"Be good! Ah, but that is very hard!"

It *is* hard—so hard that you can never do it of yourselves. And that is why God asks you to trust in Him, to lean on Him. *He* is good; and He both can and will make you good, if you will let Him. For here most of all it is true that it is *the Lord* who makes both the hearing ear and the seeing eye—the eye which sees wonderful and beautiful things in his law, and the ear which hears a Voice both of command and invitation in his gospel. But if you *are* trusting in Him, and in the righteousness and love which He has revealed in his Son—as I am glad to know that many of you are—then, I think, it will be among your greatest helps to a good, pure, and happy life to bear in mind, as you go through the world, that all things are of Him, all the beauty of earth and skies, all the dignity and sweetness of human life.

Nay, can you not see for yourselves how much it will add to your pleasure as you study his works, as you walk through fields and woods with open eye and ear, noting the beauty of the flowers and listening to the music of the birds, if you can say, "*My Father* made them all—made them all for me, for my use, for my delight, for my instruction; because He loves me, and is ever seeking to draw me to my rest in Him, by shewing me how good and wise and kind He is"? To believe in God as your Father, Redeemer, Friend; to remember God, to let all things remind you of Him and of his love for you, *must* be a train-

ing in holiness and love, as well as lend a new beauty to the world around you, and a new sweetness to your life. It will and must be a strength and consolation to you in many hours of weakness and depression; for it will teach you to say: "What sort of a father would God be if He did not care a great deal more for the children who play in his garden than for the flowers which grow and the birds which sing in it?" But it also will and must be a constant incentive to a pure and kindly life; for it will also teach you to say: "If I am God's child, I am bound to obey Him; and if my Father loves me so much as to make all that He has mine, I should have a heart as hard and as cold as a stone, if I did not love Him in return."

Remember God, your Maker and the Maker of all things, then, in the days of your youth. But remember also that your Maker is your Father, and has made all things for you, that you may possess and enjoy them all; and, chiefly, that you may possess and enjoy *Him* in them all.

XV.

THE MAN WHO WAS TOO BUSY TO DO HIS DUTY.

"And as the king passed by, he cried unto the king, and he said: Thy servant went out into the midst of the battle; and, behold, a man turned aside, and brought a man unto me, and said, Keep this man: if by any means he be missing, then shall thy life be for his life, or else thou shalt pay a talent of silver. *And as thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone.*"—1 KINGS xx. 39, 40.

THERE is much in this Chapter which must have perplexed you as I read it to you a few minutes ago,—much that needs explanation. And I should be very happy to explain it to you, so far as I can, did time permit. But time does not permit, if at least I am to speak to you about *your* business and *your* duty. And, therefore, I will only touch on the points which will enable you to understand the story told in my text, and which will lead up to the lesson I wish to enforce upon you. Give me your

attention, then, while, for a few minutes, I try to make the story clear and plain to you; and then for a few minutes more, while I try to apply its moral, or lesson, to your condition and needs.

Benhadad, one of the most powerful kings of Syria, fought at least three campaigns against Ahab, the weak and wicked king of Israel. In the first campaign he besieged Samaria with an army so vast that all resistance seemed useless. Yet because Ahab listened to the voice of his prophet, and to prove that He was the true Lord and Ruler of men, God wrought a marvellous deliverance; and Benhadad, with his "great multitude," was driven back in defeat. In the second campaign, which was fought the following summer, Benhadad invaded a province on the eastern side of the Jordan; for he had persuaded himself that Jehovah was only a god of the hills, and not a god of the plains, and that, if he avoided the hill country of Samaria, he might count upon victory. But once more Jehovah sent his prophet to assure Ahab that he would deliver Benhadad and his army into his hands; and once more, though the men of Israel were so few that, as compared with the invading host which filled all the plain, they looked to be no more than "two little flocks of kids," the Lord made them to triumph over their foes, and even Benhadad himself was taken prisoner in the city into which he had fled for refuge. But in the third campaign, three years after, because Ahab would not listen to the word of the prophet, he was

defeated and slain, although the army of Israel was now reinforced with the army of Judah, and although the two opposed hosts were on more equal terms than ever before.

It is only with the second campaign, it is only with one incident in this campaign, that we have now to do. For his many crimes and sins God had put Benhadad under his ban, had "devoted him to destruction" (ver. 42). And no doubt—though the Bible does not expressly tell us so, for it has not room to tell us everything—Ahab had been commanded to put him to death. Yet Ahab suffered himself to be so entangled by a human law, or custom, as to disobey the will of God. While Benhadad was fleeing from house to house in the city of Aphek, and from room to room, to escape the soldiers who were pursuing him, his ministers, with sackcloth round their loins and ropes round their necks, were appealing to Ahab for mercy, begging him to spare their master's life: "Thy servant Benhadad saith, I pray thee let me live." To this pitiful appeal Ahab thoughtlessly replied: "Is he still alive? he, my brother?" for then, as now, kings called each other brother. On his lips it was a merely careless and habitual phrase. But the crafty ministers of Benhadad found a good omen in the phrase, and instantly caught at it and pinned him down to it (ver. 33). "Thy *brother* Benhadad!" they exclaimed, as if the word were a pledge to treat him like a brother. As indeed, in some sense, and according

to Oriental custom, it was. For many of the Eastern races had, and the Arabs of to-day still observe, a custom which has all the force of a law, and which is now called "the law of *dakheel*." By this law, friendly words, even when unintentionally spoken, bind men to friendly actions. Any man may put himself under the protection of another, and if that other does not instantly reject his claim, and much more if any friendly word pass his lips, he is bound to protect even his worst enemy at all risks, at all costs. Mr. Layard says that, "if two enemies meet, and exchange the common salutation, *salam aleikum*, ('peace to you'), even by mistake, they will not fight," though each of them may have set out on purpose to fight the other. Nay, even if a man be pursued and smitten to the ground, he can still save his life by calling out *Dakheel!* It was this law, or custom, of which the ministers of Benhadad availed themselves. When Ahab thoughtlessly called their master my *brother*, they fastened on the word, and tried to bind him down to all it would have meant had it been spoken with deliberate intention. And as Ahab did not instantly reject their claim, he *was* bound by it: and, acting on it, he sent for Benhadad, and took him up into his own chariot, as if he were his brother indeed.

Thus he put human custom above Divine command. God had said, "Destroy Benhadad, lest he destroy you." But man said, "Keep your word, even when the word did not speak your mind." And

as Ahab obeyed man rather than God, his sin could not be suffered to pass unrebuked. A prophet is sent to rebuke it. And he rebukes it in a way so strange and so dramatic, that on this point too I must say a few words.

Many of you have thought of a Hebrew prophet, I dare say, as a sublime, if not awful, figure, his eyes flashing with the light of Inspiration, as he denounces the crimes of kings, or carries consolation and the promise of deliverance to the oppressed, or as he sits, harp in hand, chanting some noble psalm which he has caught straight from Heaven. But such a conception is by no means complete. The prophet was not always in these sublime and exalted moods. At times he was moved to rebuke the sins of men, or to direct their ways, in homely parables and figures of speech,—as, for example, when Nathan told David the story of the poor man with "one little ewe lamb," to bring home to him his sin in robbing Uriah of Bathsheba his wife; or as when the wise woman of Tekoah told him the story of her two sons, to induce him to recall Absalom from banishment. And, sometimes, they enacted parables as well as told them, that their actions might lend force to their words; as when Jeremiah went about, like a slave, with a yoke on his neck, to warn the people of their approaching captivity, and broke the yoke, after certain days, to indicate their redemption from that captivity.

It was in this homely way of spoken and acted parable that the prophet sent to Ahab rebuked him

for his sin, in sparing the man whom God had doomed to death. He compelled one of his companions, one of his fellow-prophets, to smite and wound him, that he might look like one of the soldiers who had fought in the battle against Benhadad. Then he disguised himself by placing a bandage over his wound, and drawing it down over his eyes, that Ahab might not recognize him the moment they met. And then, in this semblance of a wounded soldier, hot from the field, he threw himself in Ahab's way, and uttered his parable. "Thy servant," he said, "went out into the midst of the battle; and, behold, a man (whom we must suppose to have been a superior officer, one who had a right to command him) turned aside, and brought a man (*i.e.* a captive) unto me, and said, Keep this man: if by any means he is missing, then shall thy life be for his life, or else thou shalt pay a talent of silver. And as thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone."

This was the case he submitted to the judgment of the king. And what could the king say to it but, "Thou hast sentenced thyself; you must lose your life or pay the forfeit." And yet it is easy for us to see, what Ahab did not see, that, in pronouncing this sentence, he was passing sentence on himself, as well as on the negligent soldier. For had not God brought Benhadad *to him*, placed *him* in his hands, and said, "Keep him for death, or thou shalt die"? And had not he too been so busy with other things as to forget the charge of God, and to let his prisoner escape?

Had he not been so occupied, and pre-occupied, with the thousand thoughts and cares which come on a commander after a great battle has been fought as to speak heedlessly with his lips, and so deferential to the law of *dakheel*, the custom of the time, as to forget the will of God or to disobey it?

Both the soldier and the king had neglected their chief duty in their devotion to a multitude of minor duties and aims; and, for this neglect, the king sentences the wounded soldier to lose his life; and the supposed soldier, stripping off his disguise and reappearing as a prophet, pronounces the same sentence on the victorious king: "Thus saith the Lord, Because thou hast let go out of thy hand the man whom I had devoted to destruction, therefore thy life shall be for his life, and thy people for his people"—a sentence which was executed to the letter in the next campaign against Syria.

Now here lies our lesson—the lesson on which I wish to fix your thoughts. I want you to reflect on the way in which both old men and children, young men and maidens, are often diverted from the chief duties, the main task, of life, by what our Lord calls "the lusts of other things entering in." And what I want you especially to mark is, that these lusts, or cravings, need not be, and often are not, *evil* lusts; *i.e.* they are not necessarily evil in themselves; they may only have become evil, as matter becomes dirt, by being put in the wrong place, or

indulged at the wrong time. To be busy is not wrong; but to be so busy here and there, about this and that, as to neglect our chief duty *is* fatally wrong.

We have already before us two men who fell into this fatal mistake: the imaginary soldier, the soldier of the parable, and the actual king of Israel. And yet we cannot be sure, and therefore have no right to assume, that either of them fell into it of set purpose and design. The soldier *may* have taken a bribe of his captive; or he may have left him unguarded for a moment to plunder a dead foe of a rich garment, a costly ornament, or a pocket full of gold; but he may also have left him to strike down a foe or to secure another prisoner, or to help a wounded comrade; or he may only have been so excited by the carnage and tumult of the field, or so curious to see how the day went, as to forget all about his charge. And we who are ourselves so weak, and who need to be read and interpreted in the kindliest way by our neighbours, are bound to put the best construction on his motives which the facts will allow.

Ahab's case is still more pitiful. For, weak and therefore wicked as he was, we have no reason to infer that, in sparing Benhadad, he deliberately meant to rebel against God. He was trapped; he was entangled in his own words; he was caught in the toils of a custom by which all the men of his time and blood were ruled—a custom too which had

its generous and noble side. For, in an age when almost every man's hand was against his neighbour, was it not well that there should be some check on revenge? Was it not well that if two foes, however unintentionally, spoke friendly words to or of each other, they should be bound to lay down their arms and to follow up their friendly words with friendly deeds? There is always much to be said for a custom of long standing, though even a good custom, if too long or too rigidly adhered to, may corrupt the world. To spare a fallen foe is generous; to be bound by custom is natural, and often right. So that there is something to admire, as well as much to blame, in Ahab's treatment of his prisoner, in his dealing with him as a brother, because he had called him "brother." And we may be sure that God, who makes large allowance for us all, would not have us forget what was good in the man. While, then, we condemn him for not keeping God's will first, and doing it in spite of all hindrances, we must make full allowance for the force of custom, and for that which was good and generous in the custom of his time.

Now I don't for a moment suppose that any of *you* deliberately set yourselves against the will of God, any more than Ahab did when he let go the man whom God had put under a ban, or than the soldier did when he suffered his prisoner to escape. But, like the soldier, you may be so busy in trying to see or to do this, that, and the other, that you

may neglect the duty which you are most bound to discharge; or, like Ahab, you may be so pre-occupied with other things, and so tangled in the net of custom, as to fail of your chief end and aim. And if you are, though God will make every allowance for you that He can, yet all the bitter results of your failure and neglect will as surely come upon you as if you *had* deliberately set yourselves to rebel against his will. For even God cannot treat you as though you had done your chief duty, if you have not done it; even God, merciful as He is, cannot give you the blessedness of having reached your chief end, if you have not reached it.

What, then, you may ask, *is* our chief end and duty? And the familiar answer, the Catechism answer, to this question is as good as any, if only you understand it. Your chief end, and therefore your chief duty, is "to glorify God and to enjoy Him for ever." But *do* you understand what these familiar words mean? To glorify God is to reflect his glory. And God's glory is his goodness. To glorify God is, therefore, to share and reflect his goodness—just as to glorify the sun, is to receive and reflect his light. What that goodness is, and how we may reflect it, we see best in Christ Jesus, who, throughout his busy life, was always about his Father's business, who made it his meat and drink to God's will. So that your chief aim should be to do the will of God in all things. Your chief duty is nothing short of this—to be or to become good

after the pattern and example of our Lord Jesus Christ. And many of you, I am afraid, have been too busy here and there to keep this aim before you, too much occupied with other things to discharge this great and difficult duty. Assuredly many of us who are older than you, quite old enough therefore to know better, must confess that we have often neglected this duty and fallen short of this aim. We have suffered ourselves to be so entangled with a thousand other duties and aims, we have moved in such a round of petty engagements, pleasures, and pursuits, as to leave ourselves no leisure and no energy, or far too little energy and leisure, for a wise and constant training of the powers, virtues, and graces of the inward life, for studying and imitating the example of our Lord. And some of us have at times encouraged ourselves in this failure and neglect, I fear, by pleading the custom of our neighbours, by arguing that after all we are no worse than others, that we do not fall beneath the common standard, though we may fall far short of what God requires of us and of the teaching and example of Christ. And if those who are older than you, if many to whom you look up as wiser and better than yourselves, make this dismal confession, must not you make it too?

There never was a time, I suppose, when there was so little leisure in the world as there is now. There never was a time when there was so much to occupy and distract the minds even of children,

and to divert them from the true ends of life. If men and women are so pressed by a multitude of engagements; if the claims of business, of society, and of public life have grown so exacting that they leave little time and heart for thought, for self-examination, for worship; if every moment is so occupied that they can hardly ever sit down and consider their life as a whole, and what it was given them for, and what they are making of it, you young people are in almost, if not quite, as bad a case. You go to school at an earlier age than children used to go; you stay longer in it. You have many more subjects to study, and have to run from class to class. Even when you get home, you have lessons to prepare, at which some of you work till you go to bed, though you sit up much longer than is at all good for you. And you are for ever going in for examinations, which tax your health, and try your nerves, and cause you many anxieties and fears. Many of you, too, carry on your studies, and your examinations, after you have left school, and still run from class to class, from lecture to lecture, until you are tired out, and every now and then the doctor steps in and bids you stop. And, all the while, you have more amusements of every kind than used to fall to the lot of young people of your age, and more liberty to enjoy them. You go to concerts and picture galleries and exhibitions. You have your clubs, and your games, often very elaborate and exhausting, and you are apt, of course,

to get too fond of them. Even those of you to whose fathers and mothers holidays were rare and infrequent enjoyments must now go every year to the seaside or the mountains, and get a run into Wales, or Scotland, to France, or Germany, or Switzerland.

All these are, or may be, great advantages, if you make a wise use of them: but do you not see and feel how busy they make you, how much time they take up, how little leisure and energy they leave for serious and wholesome thought, for the pursuit of your chief end, for the discharge of your main duty? Do you not see how likely it is that, though you do not mean to waste it, your life may be frittered away on a multitude of pursuits, engagements, amusements, for want of some great and ruling aim? Just as the soldier found so much to see, or so much to do, on the field of battle that he let his prisoner escape, though he did not mean to let him escape; so you, with the best intentions, with no purpose of forgetting God and your duty to Him, may be so busy here and there that you hardly ever think of Him and of what you owe to Him; so busy as to let your true life escape, as to let the spirit which God gave you to keep and train for Him fall away from Him.

And just as Ahab could plead the custom of his time, and that there was much that was good in it, so also may you. You are not worse than others. You are only doing as they do. You *must* go with the time. You must use your advantages. Even these who love you best would be disappointed in

you, and ashamed of you, if you did not keep abreast of your rivals and companions, or ahead of them; if you passed no examinations, took no honours, won no prizes. You are expected, you are encouraged, to crowd your life as full as you can, to do as much as you can. You are taught from the first that only as you work hard at your lessons and tasks can you hope to rise, to succeed, to be happy in life. And even if you only excel in playing some difficult game, your parents are proud of your skill, your friends make much of you, you are always in request. How, then, are you to blame for being so busy? Or—to put the question in a more useful as well as a more gracious form—how can you avoid being so busy as to neglect your chief duty, the duty which most of all you owe to yourselves and to God?

I know of but one answer to this question; and I have already suggested it to you when I spoke of the Lord Jesus as being always about his Father's business all through his busy life, and as doing the will of God in all He did.

While you are young at least, while you are "under tutors and governors," you cannot do much to alter the conditions of your life; and even when you are grown up, you will find it much harder to alter even one of them than you may suppose. You cannot say, "I will not learn so many lessons, or try to do so much, that I may have more leisure to think of God and serve Him:" for that would be to sin against Him, since He has bidden you obey your

parents and all who are in authority over you. But, though you cannot alter the conditions of your life, you may alter the spirit you carry into them. You may say, you may resolve, "I will *not* forget God, or neglect the duty I owe to Him." For, however busy you may be, there is no reason why you should not serve Him in all you do. There is no reason why you should not learn your lessons to please Him, as well as to please your parents and teachers. There is no reason why you should not so play your games, or enjoy your amusements, as to please Him, as well as to please your companions and friends. That is to say, there is no reason why you should not carry a just and devout, a considerate and kindly, spirit into all your work and play. There is every reason why you should. For all the world will tell you that there is no happiness like that of being good, of obeying the high pure Will which rules the universe, and of finding your supreme delight in obeying it. So to love the will of God as to make it your own, so to trust in that Will as to be freed from all care and fear, because you know that all is and must be well with you so long as God's will is done—this is the only abiding and unfailing source of content, and peace, and joy. And if, in all you do, you are thus serving and pleasing God, you *will* be growing good after the pattern and example of Christ; you *will* be keeping and training the soul which God has committed to your charge. And though you may still be as busy as ever, you will not be neglecting,

you will be discharging, your chief duty. You will be glorifying God, receiving and reflecting his goodness: and hence you will enjoy Him both now and for ever.

Of course, you cannot do this great duty in your own strength, as I dare say most of you have found out by this time. But it is *God* who has called you to do it, and who has made the whole happiness and peace of your life dependent on doing it. And when God calls us to any duty, his very call is a promise that He will be our strength; that if we ask Him for grace to do his will, He will help us to do it, and so help us that He will not suffer us to fail. So that what you really have to do if you would not fall short of your chief end is, first of all, to resolve, "By God's help, I *will* try to remember Him, to serve and please Him in all I do, however busy I may be;" and, then, to ask Him to remember you amid all your weakness and temptations, and so to help you that you may both glorify and enjoy Him for ever. If you will thus resolve and pray, we will join our prayers to yours. And if you thus "seek God by prayer and by endeavour," I can promise you that you shall "find Him gracious ever."

XVI.

THE FOUNTAIN OF DELIGHT.

A CHRISTMAS SERMON.

"Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart."—PSALM xxxvii. 4.

THERE are many beautiful psalms in the Psalter; but I am disposed to think that this psalm is the most beautiful of them all. There is a strain of old experience in it, of ripe and mellow wisdom, of thoughtful and tranquil affection, which at once stirs and calms our hearts. I can never read it but that it calls up before me the figure of a venerable and kindly old man, who has seen much and endured much, but has at last won for himself a sacred tranquility and peace which no change and no alarm can disturb; who, now that he is old, does not forget either that he has been young, or what his hot eager youth was

like: and who, in the calm evening of his days, draws upon the accumulated stores of his knowledge and experience for the benefit of those in whom the fires of youth still burn hotly, and tries to save them from many a conflict, and many a defeat, by teaching them the secret of peace. And as I am to speak to you, the children of this Congregation, and especially to you elder children who are home for your holidays, what better can I do than to set this wise, kind, good old man talking to you, and ask you to listen to the lessons he has to teach.

He has many things to say to you, my dear young friends, some of which, for all so beautiful as they sound, have, I dare say, but little charm for you as yet, because you have not learned to apply them to your own circumstances and conditions; and some of which, though they are so true and precious to us who have seen more years than you, seem to you not at all true, because you have not learned to read them aright. Now I will try to shew you both that some of these doubtful-looking words *are* true, and that they have a very special meaning and value for you.

For example: some of you lads and lasses who are still at School may have companions who are quicker than you, though not so industrious; or they may have more taking manners than you have, though not more kindly hearts. Some of them may even have less conscience than you, and may win

success at school and praise at home by means which you are too honest to employ. And, to *you*, the wise kind Psalmist, who had seen so much of human life, and of the different ends to which different courses of life conduct men,—to you he says: "*Fret not thyself.* The success and favour which are falsely won never last long. Sterling qualities always beat showy pretensions in the end. If you are really honest, really industrious, really unselfish and kind, you have what men like best; you have the virtues that wear best: and it will not be long before they find out that you possess them."

Others of you, who are older, and have done with School or College, may be growing anxious about your future career. You have tried to fit yourselves for some useful work in life; but you are hampered by straitened means, or by personal disadvantages for which you are not responsible. No door opens to you, though you have knocked at a good many, or no such door as you would like to go through. You do not see where you are to find the work for which you are fit, or the means to make yourselves still more fit for it. And you are careful, sad, almost hopeless at times, and disposed to think that no capable lad, no willing girl, was ever thwarted as you are, or had such a burden to bear.

Has the Psalmist, who knows so much, and has seen so much that nothing seems to surprise or disturb him, anything to say to *you*, any encourag-

ing counsel and assurance? He has this to say: "*Rest in the Lord; Roll your burden* on the Lord, and wait patiently for Him. *He* will open a door for you; He will clear the way before you, if only you are patient and look to Him, desiring to serve Him in all you do. The waiting may be as good for you as any work could be. It may prove to be a part, and the best part, of the discipline by which He is preparing you for your proper work in the world. And be sure of this: He will not suffer any capacity for service to go unused. Wait patiently, then, and you will work patiently by and bye; and patience in well-doing is the most effective quality of all, the most certain of success. Wait; and work while you wait: and sweeten both the work and the waiting by trust in Him."

Again: almost all of you, I suppose, take it for granted that you would be quite happy if you could only change your outward circumstances, and shape them to your mind; if you could get as much money as you would like, for example, and live in the company you like, and get the sort of work you like; or, perhaps even, you feel that you could dispense with work altogether, if only you could have everything else to your taste. You crave pleasure, variety of scene and action, and think you could be content if you had the world at your feet. *But could you?*

All through this Psalm the wise kind Writer of it is asking you to consider that assumption. The

contrast he draws between the good man and the bad man, with their respective ends, is intended to suggest to you such questions as these: "If I lived in the best company in the world, *and had a bad heart*, could I be happy then? If I had all the money in the world, and all that money can bring, *with a haunted conscience*, could I be at peace then?" The truth he sets himself to teach you is, that it is not any change in outward conditions which robs us of our peace; but our unruled affections, our excessive cravings, our ill-regulated desires. The fountain of peace is within us, not outside us. If a bad toothache, an aching nerve, would make the wealthiest and most prosperous of men miserable, how much more would a wounded and alarmed conscience, or a sullen, suspicious, and selfish heart? But the poorest of men can afford to keep a good conscience and a kindly heart; *i.e.* he may possess all that is essential to peace.

You must not imagine, however, that the Wise old Man, who speaks so gravely to you, takes an austere and gloomy view of human life. To no man was life ever more bright and serene. Nor must you imagine that he frowns on your craving for pleasure, for delight; or that he bids you mortify the natural and eager desires of your hearts. On the contrary, he shews you where you may find the truest and most enduring delight, and promises that the inmost and deepest desires of your heart shall be satisfied. And, I dare say, that nothing in the whole Psalm

seems so strange, so incredible, to you as this promise, the promise of my text. Yet it is simply and obviously true, as I will try to shew you. Only, if you would *see* it to be true, you must take the whole verse together, and not a part of it by itself. What the Psalmist really promises you is that, if you delight yourselves in the Lord, the Lord will satisfy your utmost craving for delight; that if you desire *Him*, He will give you the desire of your heart.

Are you disappointed? Do you feel injured, and put off from the bright expectations you had begun to frame, when one of the wisest and kindest of men tells you to find your delight in Religion? Other young people—to whom God has been made a bugbear, and the future a terror—might naturally feel injured and disappointed; but I don't think *you* ought to feel so. For consider what the religion is which you have been taught. You have been taught that God is your Father, the great God who made heaven and earth, and rules all the affairs of men; and that He loves you so dearly that He will never let you go. *And is it not delightful to have such a Father as that?* You have been taught that in his love He became a man, took our sorrows and our sins upon Him, and bore them for us, that He might give us life and make us good. *And is it not delightful to have such a Saviour as that?* You have been taught that He is ever seeking you, ever finding you, in all the happy thoughts and kindly impulses which stir within you, whether they come to you from the fair natural world

or from books, or from the sacred affections and charities of home, or from the kindnesses of friends and companions, or from the duties you discharge, or from the pleasures you enjoy? *And is it not delightful, most delightful, to have such a Friend and Teacher as that?*

Your religion does nothing to make you frightened whether of God or of death. It teaches you that God's will, his purpose and end, is the welfare and salvation of all men. It bids you follow after whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are venerable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are fair, whatsoever things are genial and gracious. It accepts whatever service you render to men as duty done to God. It throws open the gates of heaven to you, and assures you of a glorious victory over sin and the grave. And is not that a religion in which you can delight; in which you ought to delight? In a world so full of changes, and losses, and partings, as this, and with characters so liable to faults and defects as ours, *where* can we look for stability, for rest, for an unfailing and unchanging source of joy if not here, if not in these great, ennobling, elevating facts and truths?

Compare with this ever-flowing and all-sustaining fountain of delight those other springs at which men have sought to slake their thirst—as wealth, success, reputation, or even intellectual culture and pursuits. So long as these are kept in their proper place, as ministers, not lords, of the soul, no sensible man has

a word to say against them. But money, though a good servant, is the most sordid and brutalizing of masters; and even taken at its best, what can money do for us when the heart is hungry for love, or the spirit that is in man looks above the earth or beyond the grave? All natural and innocent pleasures are good, if they be lawfully used, used for recreation and amusement: but how wearisome they become when they are converted into the main task of life! and what can they do for us when youth passes, or health fails, and our days creep by laden with an increasing burden of infirmities and anxieties, cares and fears? Success! Reputation! It is natural, and may be laudable, that we should desire to succeed in whatever we undertake, and to win liking and honour from our fellow-men. But the sense of worldly success will not compensate a man for the ravages of disease, or the approach of age, or comfort him in hours of sorrow and bereavement; nor will the plaudits of a world which has become distasteful to him or is fading from his sight. Even purely intellectual culture and pursuits, while they may suffice us, or appear to suffice us, so long as we retain our full vigour of mind, and though they bring us a purer and more honourable delight than we can find in aught but that which is best of all, *may* fail to satisfy us even then: and what can they do for us when the brain weakens, and the memory fails, or when the heart craves the ministrations of a love that can never change or die, and the soul insists on its immortal birthright?

If you will but think the matter out for yourselves, even you young people, provided that you remember you cannot always be young and that you know anything of the depths and cravings of your own hearts, will, I am sure, conclude, both that there is no such pure, elevating, and unfailing source of delight as that which Religion offers you even in times of health and vigour: and that, just when all other sources fail you, *this* flows most abundantly, and is fullest of comfort and a strengthening joy. It offers you a wealth, a pleasure, a success, an honour, as pure and as eternal as itself. It offers you guidance in every time of your perplexity, comfort in every time of your grief, strength in every time of your weakness. It sweetens and hallows all joys; it lessens and sanctifies all sorrows. It shines the brightest when all other lights go out; and yet shines *through* all other lights with rays so keen and stedfast as to eclipse, and yet to enhance, them all.

If you are wise, then, or will learn from the wise, you will seek your delight at the true Fountain of Delight. You will delight yourselves in the Lord, to whom it is the very office of religion to conduct and bind you. And if you delight in Him, and in his will for you and for all men, who can doubt that He will give you the desires of your heart? For your will will become one with his: and must not his high Will be done?

Stated in that bald abstract form, the prospect

may not seem very attractive to you, nor the promise of much value. But think—think what it means. God's will is your welfare: and do you not desire your own welfare? God's will is the salvation of all men: and do not *you* desire that all men should be saved from all things ill—from fault and defect, sin and fear—that they may live in the service of truth and righteousness and charity? Is it a small thing that God should promise you *that?* Is it not the very greatest promise that even He could make you? To be sure that, however weak and wavering and sinful you may feel, God means to make you good men and women, and so to secure your eternal welfare; to be sure that, whatever the wickedness and misery you see in the world around you, God means to save the world: to have *this* sacred divine secret confided to you, that God is preparing a new heaven and a new earth in which a renewed Humanity shall dwell with Him for ever; that beyond death and judgment there lies a land the righteousness of which is like great mountains down whose slopes peace flows like a river,—where will you find any any prospect so large, so bright, so sustaining as this? where any promise so precious, so fraught with courage and hope? where any fountain of delight so invigorating and perennial and sweet? If you get *all that*, will you not get the deepest desires of your heart?

Yet this is what Religion offers you, what God offers you. And it is high time that you accepted

the offer—if, indeed, you have not already accepted it—and began to find your delight in Him. The year is closing in upon us, and what a year it has been? The mere flight of time prompts you to decision: and do not the events of the year imperatively warn you to decide for Him? Nothing could be farther from my wish than to appeal to your fears. But I must appeal to your reason and experience.

Remember, then, how many of our friends, who worshipped with us but a little while ago, have been taken away from us by death—more in this year than in any I can recall. And not only old people, or people who must have seemed old to you, but at least three or four of your young companions and schoolfellows who sat with you only a few months ago, and listened as you are listening now. We need not weep and mourn for them, nor be either of a sad countenance or a sad heart; for they are in the better land, the land of righteousness and peace, of which I was just speaking to you. What I want you to bear in mind is, that you may soon follow them, nay, that you *must* follow them before long. And I want you to bear it in mind, not because it is a sorrowful and gloomy fact—for what is there of sorrowful in the thought of going home to God, if only we have learned, as *they* had learned, to delight in Him? but that you *may learn* to delight yourselves in Him.

For what most of all hinders you from closing with the offers of Religion is, I suppose, that the great

realities of Religion seem much less real to you than many of the things with which you are more familiar. That God is your Father, your Saviour, your Teacher and Friend; that his will is your welfare, your salvation; that heaven, therefore, is your true home, and eternity your portion: all this, I suppose, feels less real and true to you than that you have kinsfolk here who love and care for you, that it is pleasant to be well off and to get on, or to read nice books and to live with nice people. And hence I want you to reflect what you mean by *realities*. You mean, do you not, the things that *last*, the things that *satisfy;* the things which you can always have with you, and that will never fail nor disappoint you. But if that is what you mean, there are no realities like those of Religion. It is not the Bible alone which tells you, science and experience also tell you, that a time is coming when the body and all that pleases the senses will perish, when the very world itself, with all that it inherits and contains, will perish; when nothing will be left you but your own soul, and what you have made of it and carry in it.

The things that last, then, are the soul, and the relations of the soul to God. The things that satisfy are a soul at peace with God, a soul that can find its delight in Him; sympathy with his will; a love which springs to meet his love; and the assurance that nothing can ever separate us from his love. These are the true, the supreme, realities. All else will change or pass; but these never. Change and

death have no power over them. They will be your light and joy here; and then your light and joy through the great hereafter.

Begin, then, to delight yourselves in the Lord, and begin at once; that He may at once begin to give you the desires of your heart.

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